

The Emanuele Cancer Research Foundation Malta

From Biology to the Clinic

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University of Malta – Valletta Campus

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Before I start, I would like to thank all of you for being here this evening to share our thoughts, information and updates on cancer research being conducted by the Researchers through the Emanuele Cancer Research Foundation, ALIVE, RIDT and other charities and organisations.

I also would like to thank all the imminent speakers that will provide us with constructive information and know how.

I would like to especially thank and welcome Dottore Andrea Battifoglia, who has come all the way from Rome to be with us this evening, as the representative of our Italian partner, Fondazione Terzo Pilastro Internazionale, within the Emanuele Cancer Research Foundation.

Now for some remarks from my end, as a person who looks at cancer and its impact on the lives of sufferers, from a social perspective.

Though in Malta, cardiovascular diseases remained the leading cause of death it continuous to be closely followed by cancer with around 2500 persons diagnosed with cancer every year, with men being affected more than females.

The reality is that research is showing that 1 in 2 will get cancer in their lifetime, however the positive side to this statistic, is that at present around 50% of people afflicted with cancer, will survive.

Even more positive is the fact that some of the common cancers such as breast and prostate cancers that have a higher survival rate of about 88%.

Yesterday while addressing a conference organised by the European Cancer Organisations, an OECD Health Economist, Caroline Berchet, specifically pointed out, Malta's significant performance in cancer survival, which surpasses the EU average levels.

A growing body of research on cancer and equity continues to clearly show that the social determinants of health impact on a person's risk of cancer.

We know for a fact that around 40% of cancer can be preventable – with the main causes being smoking, alcohol, lack of exercise, obesity, and unhealthy diets.

Research is also showing us that there is a clear correlation between educational attainment in children and their future health status.

Poverty, material deprivation, and social exclusion have a major impact on health in general, including cancer.

It is evident that there is a causal link, among lower education, precarious or lack of employment, mental ill-health, and poverty.

People in poverty would not have enough means to go for healthy options.

People in poverty would only think of how to obtain their next meal, whatever this might be, even if they are aware of the importance of healthy options.

So, what should our next step be?

I truly believe that cancer cannot be considered solely from a medical perspective, but cancer prevention must also be addressed from a social perspective.

I also very much believe that we need to work together: researchers, academics, practitioners, civil society organisations and all other relevant stakeholders together with policy makers and government authorities, to be able to prevent and treat cancer, to continue to improve our mortality rate.

But how can this be achieved?

I believe that Legislation, Long Term Planning, and Education are three important pillars for our country's way forward.

Now that The Emanuele Cancer Research Foundation Malta, is on to its 6th year since it was brought into being in October 2017 by the 3 founding members The Malta Trust Foundation, Fondazione Terzo Pilastro Internazionale and the University of Malta, we are intensifying our work to facilitate excellence in cancer research and collaboration with scientific, clinical and psychosocial disciplines.

The ECRFM is committed to assist long term planning through research funding and after a break in our activity due to the pandemic, we are currently planning to increase our educational campaign starting by organising national conferences.

More importantly, we are embarking into community outreach through the local councils. In fact, during these past months, we already had two such events, one in Qormi and another one in Zabbar with more already planned and committed to.

Apart from this, we are at the moment in the process of preparing a new 5-year strategy which will include more use of the social media and school campaigns.

Unfortunately, though another 60% of cancer cannot be prevented, but it can be treated and cured.

This can only happen if research is undertaken on the various aspects of cancer starting from early diagnosis to innovative treatments such as targeted treatment, immunotherapy, and precision tumour destruction, but also, by taking on board psycho-social aspects from both a patient perspective as well as a carer being either professional

or a family member, some of which, we shall hear about this evening.

To date, the ECRFM, has succeeded in obtaining over 5 million Euros in funds, with around 60% already spent on the purchasing of state-of-the-art equipment for the laboratories at the University of Malta, and the funding of various projects.

The ECRFM shall continue to strive to obtain further funds, so as to be able to launch yearly funding opportunities for Maltese researchers.

In addition to funding, the ECRFM has signed a number of MOU's with prestigious foreign research entities and has been influential in having Maltese researchers partnering with foreign ones to apply for research funds, in particular with National Cancer Research Centre of Beijing, that is the largest cancer centre in the Far East.

I am pleased also to note that the ECRFM is also a full member of the Association of European Cancer Leagues, and an active champion and supporter of the community 365 initiative of the European Cancer Organisations.

We are also committed, as ECRFM to enhance our collaborate with other local charities such as ALIVE as well as other cancer organisations, to assist in research and educational activities, so as to reduce the burden of cancer.

We hope that this evening's contributions will give us some insight on the cutting-edge research being undertaken by Malta based scientists.

Before I conclude I would like to acknowledge Prof Christian Scerri's hard work in bringing together this conference. It was Prof Scerri's persistent discussions, that motivated me to think of a cancer research foundation in 2015, which then materialised thanks to Professor Emanuele Emanuele, the President of Fondazione Terzo Pilastro Internazionale, who contributed the significant funds of 5m euros.

Once again, I would like to thank our colleague and friend, Dottore Andrea Bottifoglia.

Finally, I would like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to Nicky Camilleri, ALIVE founder, and chair together with his team, for the important contribution to research including cancer research, during these last years.