

Brussels, February 4, 2023

MNI statement on the occasion of World Cancer Day

Non-communicable diseases make up 80 per cent of the disease burden across European Union countries, with cancer considered a leading cause of deaths. In 2020, some 1.7 million people throughout Europe are estimated to have died from cancer.

On February 4, World Cancer Day, we come together to raise awareness on this life-altering disease. On the occasion, MNI wishes to reiterate its call to put cancer patients' needs first by integrating nutritional care to sustain the quality of life of cancer patients.

Malnutrition in cancer

One in three cancer patients is malnourished¹, which is a frequent complication and can negatively affect the outcome of treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiotherapy or surgery. On the other hand, side effects of anticancer therapies can also lead to inadequate nutrient intake and subsequent malnutrition.² Malnourished patients are at risk of organ damage, immune system dysfunction, lean muscle loss, and have a significantly increased risk of infections and complications. This can lead to diminished tolerability of chemotherapy, including delays and modifications of anti-cancer treatments and impact of overall survival. The cost of their care increases at a significant burden to healthcare systems. Malnourished cancer patients are more frequently hospitalised, and experience longer hospital stays. Often less than 50% of patients identified as malnourished receive nutritional intervention. The opportunity for early identification and appropriate management of malnutrition or risk of malnutrition is therefore often missed.³

In cancer care, nutritional therapies can greatly enhance quality of life and improve survival rates.

MNI's call to integrate nutritional care in cancer treatment

Beating cancer is an EU priority and on February 2022, the European Parliament resolution on the report "Strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer" notably established nutritional support as part of optimal cancer care.⁴ Despite [recent reports](#) on integrated geriatric cancer care pointing to the importance of out-of-hospital treatment or proper [nutrition across all settings](#), **health gaps and inequalities in access to nutritional care remain.**

¹ Medical Nutrition International Industry (MNI). 2018. "[Better care through better nutrition: value and effects of medical nutrition - A summary of the evidence base](#)".

² Santarpià, Contaldo & Pasanisi. 2011. "Nutritional screening and early treatment of malnutrition in cancer patients". Mar; 2(1): 27–35. Published online 2011 Feb 22. doi: 10.1007/s13539-011-0022-x.

³ Medical Nutrition International Industry (MNI). 2018. "[Better care through better nutrition: value and effects of medical nutrition - A summary of the evidence base](#)".

⁴European Parliament. 2022. "REPORT on strengthening Europe in the fight against cancer – towards a comprehensive and coordinated strategy" (2020/2267(INI)).

MNI calls the EU Member States to:

- Develop recommendations for incorporating clinical nutrition, where it is needed, as demonstrated by research and clinicians into all aspects of cancer care, including treatment, support and research.
- Enhance malnutrition screening via a systematic, standardised and harmonised screening practice.
- Develop minimum standards for continuous training on nutritional care for the multidisciplinary workforce, including extending nutritional training to undergraduate medical students, general practitioners and oncology nurses.
- Make nutrition counselling available in primary healthcare.
- Raise awareness on medical nutrition and its purpose amongst informal carers.