

CANCER

Everything **oncology professionals** should discuss with their patients but maybe were afraid to start..



SEX

Everything **patients** wanted to know about their sexual health but were afraid to ask...

PRESS RELEASE - 21 September 2020

Sex and cancer: cancer leagues and experts team up to help patients and healthcare professionals start the conversation about sexuality and intimacy

New informational leaflets from ECL to celebrate Sexual Health Awareness Month 2020

Brussels, Belgium – **ECL is launching new informational leaflets illustrating how healthcare professionals and cancer patients can initiate much needed conversations about sexuality and intimacy issues.**

Though cancer awareness has greatly increased in the last decades, its impact on sexual life and intimacy remains largely hidden. **It is well-known that a cancer diagnosis and its sometimes long-lasting treatment can impair the sexual life of patients and survivors.** This contributes to a deterioration of their quality of life and can also lead to an alteration of their therapeutic adhesion and therefore of their prognosis. **Many cancer patients suffer sexual dysfunction after cancer treatment, but it's a side effect that is rarely discussed.** The subject is uncomfortable for many under normal circumstances and tends to be forgotten in the midst of the flow of information about treatment options and other priorities. No one seems to want to talk about the side effects of cancer treatment on sexual function and intimacy. But here's why we must.

For a variety of populations and of cancer and treatment types, **estimates of sexual dysfunctions range from 20% to 100%** and involve both physical and psycho-social causes. Moreover, side effects do not just affect sex life. Some can impair everyday life and impact negatively mental health. In fact, **studies suggest that sexuality issues are a top quality of life concern of cancer patients.**

[@Alrik Meesen @kwf_nl](#)



“The ECL Patient Support Working Group has been working on improving effective communication between healthcare professionals and cancer patients in the past year. We acknowledge that the sexual health of people diagnosed with cancer is almost always overshadowed by the cancer and its treatment. Oncologists are focused on treating the disease and the more pressing issues and side effects. And the patients think they shouldn't be talking about it because there is some level of shame. To this end, our new leaflets provide some suggestions and sample questions to help both parties starting the conversation” said **Alrik Meesen, Chair of the ECL Patient Support Working Group.**



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Who ever said that cancer patients, whether old or young, do not have sex? Why do healthcare professionals often make that assumption or fail to address the subject? Busting these myths is the first step in being able to provide the most comprehensive care possible during their cancer journey. It is now becoming obvious that, as with other aspects of medical care, the issue of sexuality must be raised by healthcare professionals in order to inform patients of the impact of treatments, to identify their needs, to prevent and treat any complications, and if necessary to refer them to specialists, psychologists, psychiatrists or sexologists.

[@hansneefs1](#) [@komop_tgkanker](#)



Hans Neefs, member of the ECL Patient Support Working Group and leader of the sexuality work stream added: "Talk about what no one wants to talk about. Let's help make this subject not so taboo and more just a routine conversation we have with our patients and survivors. We, as healthcare providers and experts, need to become comfortable with bringing up the subject so our patients don't have to. If we really care about their quality of life, we should educate them on possible sexual-related side effects from their treatment and what steps can be taken, if any, to preserve their fertility. And we should do so by providing a safe and culturally relevant space for patients and survivors to open up."

[@essm_tweets](#)



Welcoming the publication of the leaflets, **Dr. Woet Gianotten, Oncosexology Consultant and Member of the European Society for Sexual Medicines (ESSM)** commented, "These ECL leaflets are not only a valuable source of information for patients and their partners but also for the various cancer professionals. Addressing sexuality and intimacy topics improve the connection and communication between patients and healthcare professionals. Congratulations on these leaflets!"



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NOTES FOR EDITORS



Download the leaflets:

https://www.europeancancerleagues.org/wp-content/uploads/ECL-Cancer-and-Sexuality-Leaflet-Patients_September-2020.pdf

https://www.europeancancerleagues.org/wp-content/uploads/ECL-Cancer-and-Sexuality-Leaflet-HCP_September-2020.pdf



ABOUT THE ECL'S PATIENT SUPPORT WORKING GROUP

Since 2007, the ECL Patient Support Working Group (PSWG) connects cancer care experts who share knowledge and work together on developing best practice guides and informational materials to raise awareness and improve the quality of cancer care in Europe. The PSWG focuses on a wide range of matters, including access to insurance and financial services, return to work, caregiver support, sexuality and relationships issues, cancer rehabilitation and palliative care. PSWG members strive to make the patient voice heard in national and European decision-making.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Anna Prokůpková
Advocacy & Project Manager
Association of European Cancer Leagues (ECL)
anna@europeancancerleagues.org



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