

For immediate release

Global childhood cancer organizations launch early detection campaign to save thousands of children's lives

Geneva | 15 February 2012 – Today is the International Childhood Cancer Day. The International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP) and the International Confederation of Childhood Cancer Parent Organizations (ICCCPO) are launching a targeted grassroots health advocacy campaign to better educate the public in recognizing the early warning signs for childhood cancer.

Each year 175,000 children worldwide are diagnosed with cancer, of which an estimated 90,000 will die from the disease. The exact number of new cases is not known because in many countries not all children with cancer are registered and many are not even diagnosed correctly. These figures are staggering given the fact that 70% of all childhood cancers are curable when diagnosed and treated early. Cancer is the second leading cause of death among children in developed countries. The most common type of cancer in Europe, Americas, East Asia and among the Caucasian population is Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia, whereas Burkitt's lymphoma, associated with malaria and infection from the Epstein Barr virus, accounts for half of all childhood lymphomas in African countries.

"The symptoms of cancer can often be interpreted as common childhood ailments" warns Dr Gabriele Calaminus, the president of SIOP.

The following symptoms, if persistent, could be signs for childhood cancer:

- White spot in the eye, new squint, blindness, bulging eyeball.
- Lump in abdomen/pelvis, head and neck, in limbs, testes, glands.
- Unexplained prolonged fever over 2 weeks.
- Loss of weight, pallor, fatigue, easy bruising or bleeding
- Aching bones, joints, back, and easy fractures.
- Neurological signs: change or deterioration in walk, balance, or speech, regression of Milestones
- Headache for more than two weeks with or without vomiting, enlarging head

"It is vital for parents to take their child to a physician or a qualified healthcare provider for further consultation if any of these symptoms persist" implores Calaminus.

By dinner time tonight, someone's son, daughter, sister or brother -- an estimated 440 children -- will have been diagnosed with this life-threatening disease while some 250 children from around the world would have succumbed to it. "Cancer in children is but a fraction of the global cancer burden but for children and their families, it is a matter of hope, courage and determination... a difference between life and death" explains Kenneth Dollman, ICCPO president and a parent of a child who was diagnosed with, and has survived Leukemia.

While eighty percent (80%) of children with cancer survive in wealthier countries, the reality is vastly different for those living in resource-poor settings and where 80% of all children with cancer live. This is compounded by the fact that these are the same places where there is often an absence or a lack in knowledge about what childhood cancer is. Not only is childhood cancer detected too late for effective treatment, it is also compounded by limited access to appropriate treatment, resulting in approximately eighty percent (80%) of children with cancer dying. Dollman, a South African parent, explains: “delayed diagnosis significantly diminishes survival rates. While in resource-rich countries, 8 out of 10 children survive, only 2 to 3 out of 10 children will survive in low and middle-income countries”.

Myths surrounding childhood cancer, moreover, adds to the challenges in disseminating proper information. In some communities, for example, children with retinoblastoma or “cat’s eye reflex” are often regarded with having supernatural powers and are left untreated until it is too late.

Today, SIOP and ICCCPo, with its members from around the world will be reaching out to communities, schools, hospitals, and the public in general. Parents will be working alongside paediatric oncologists, paediatricians, nurses, public health advocates and others in disseminating vital information about childhood cancer. For more information about activities in your region, please contact

SIOP Asia, <http://siop-asia.com/ja/news-letters-ja.html>

Children’s Cancer Association of Japan, <http://www.ccaj-found.or.jp/>

SIOP and ICCCPo have prepared a Joint Action Plan on early warning signs for childhood cancer. More information about the Action Plan by SIOP and ICCCPo, can be obtained by visiting their society websites at www.siop.nl and www.icccpo.org, respectively.

About the International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP)

Established in 1969, the International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP), with over 1500 members, is the leading global organization concerned with the issues of children and young people who have cancer. The society envisions that “no child should die of cancer.” To realize this vision, SIOP’s mission are to: (1) ensure that each child and young adult with cancer has access to state-of-the-art treatment and care; (2) ensure that all involved in childhood cancer worldwide, have access to the latest progress through meetings, networking, and continuing professional development; (3) support those caring for children and young adults with cancer to provide the best curative and palliative therapies; and, (4) advocate for appropriate long-term follow-up for children and young adults after treatment for cancer. Dr. Gabrielle Calaminus is the president of SIOP. SIOP is governed by a board of directors and has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. www.siop.nl

About the International Confederation of Childhood Cancer Parent Organizations (ICCCPO)

ICCCPO is the largest organization of its kind representing families of children with cancer. ICCCPo wants to see a world where the issues faced by children with cancer and their families, both in the short and long-term, are understood by families, healthcare professionals and the wider community to ensure that children receive the best possible care wherever they are in the world at the time of diagnosis and beyond. ICCCPo's mission is to share information and experiences in order to improve access to the best possible treatment & care for children with cancer everywhere in the world. www.icccpo.org

SIOP Media Contact

JJ Divino, MPH

Communications and External Relations

International Society of Paediatric Oncology

Geneva, Switzerland

tel: 0041 22 906 9123

email: jdivino@kenes.com

ICCCPO Media Contact

Marianne Naafs-Wilstra MA

c/o VOKK

Schouwstede 2B, 3431 JB Nieuwegen

NETHERLANDS

Tel: +31 30 242 2944

icccpo-secretariat@vokk.nl