

NOTE FOR THE MEDIA

“Yes, we can! Childhood cancer can be beaten” declares SIOP and ICCCPPO

Geneva | 15 February 2013 – Today is International Childhood Cancer Day – a day in which the strength, courage and resiliency of children with cancer and their families are celebrated.

The International Society of Paediatric Oncology and the International Confederation of Childhood Cancer Parent Organizations (ICCCPO), with their 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 and life-saving information about childhood cancer.

SIOP and ICCCPPO are calling on governments worldwide to commit in winning the fight against childhood cancer. These include the access to affordable “best standard of care”, including programs for early detection and the adaptation of treatment regimens from resource-rich settings into developing countries. The two organizations represent over 1500 paediatric oncologists and 158 parent support organizations, representing nearly 85% of the world’s population.

The field of paediatric oncology has matured significantly since systematic therapy for childhood cancer became available in the 1950s. In the industrialized world, five year survival has improved continuously from less than 20% in the 1960s to 80% at the turn of this century, with the expectation that most children with cancer will now be cured. The challenge remains in resource-poor settings, notably in low and middle-income countries where the majority of children with cancer live. Children with cancer continue to lose their battles in these countries due to the fact that programs for early detection, treatment and know-how are simply not available. This, despite the fact that simple deliverables such as early warning signs are available and it has already been proven that by adapting treatment regimens in wealthier countries, the gap in cure rates would close. Cure rates for children with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL), for example, are 80-85% in high-income countries while much lower in resource-poor countries.

Case studies in Brazil, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala have clearly demonstrated that by adapting ALL protocols in North America and Western Europe, child survival rates significantly improved. Moreover, public education and awareness campaigns have successfully increased the rate of early diagnosis, even in low-and middle-income countries Children and young people can be spared from some of the effects of the most intensive treatments if their cancers are diagnosed early enough and treatment begun early enough. In Honduras, for example, an inexpensive national awareness campaign was associated with the decrease in retinoblastoma that had spread beyond the eye from 73% to 35%.

SIOP President Gabriele Calaminus, a paediatric oncologist herself, explains “the evidence is there. What are we waiting for? Thousands of lives can be saved if we act now! But, governments themselves must take the responsibility for their own people. The Alma-Ata Declaration has documented the need for “Health for All” more than 30 years ago stating that all people must have access to health services. The fact is, in 2013, this remains a target and not the reality”.

Kenneth Dolman, the president of ICCCPPO and a parent of a childhood cancer survivor notes” I have personal experience of a child who was initially misdiagnosed through a lack of knowledge. ICCCPPO members and partners are committed to supporting any project in the world that will lead to the early diagnosis of childhood cancer and already enjoy the support of many forward-thinking governments. It just makes economic sense for governments to support such awareness and early detection projects and to not only save on the extra costs of treating a patient with late stage cancer, but also to spare the heart-ache and suffering of its citizens.”

Both organizations are hopeful and optimistic that with the support of sister health NGOs and international health agencies such as the World Health Organization, the fight against childhood cancer, especially in regions where the needs are greatest, is at a major turning point for the better.

Childhood cancer experts will be meeting in Hong Kong on 25-28 September during the 45th SIOP World Congress, to follow-up on implementation plans.

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About SIOP

Established in 1969, the International Society of Paediatric Oncology (SIOP), with over 1500 members, is the lead 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. Gabriele Calaminus is the president of SIOP. SIOP is governed by a board of directors and has its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. www.siop-online.org

About ICCCPO

The International Childhood Cancer Confederation of Parents Organizations (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