



A Partnership with potential

→ Kathy Redmond ■ EDITOR

How do you help close the gap between the worst and the best cancer outcomes in Europe, when you have no legal basis for intervening in Member States' health policies and have precious little money set aside? The answer the European Commission has come up with is the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer, the first body of its kind, which was launched last September.

The Partnership takes as its starting point the idea that, when it comes to cancer, every country, region and hospital, every patient group, professional body and NGO, is trying to tackle broadly similar problems. Great progress could be made, perhaps particularly where it is needed most, by coordinating efforts, eliminating duplication, sharing what we already know about best practice and optimising the use of limited resources.

The work of the Partnership will be taken forward through a 'joint action' – an EU mechanism whereby Member States commit to take action in a specific area. Four areas have been identified: prevention; identifying and spreading good practice; a coordinated and collaborative approach to research; and the collection and analysis of accurate and comparable information.

This initiative is to be welcomed, and we very much hope it will prove able to deliver on its highly ambitious aim.

Success will depend on two key factors. First, there needs to be adequate funding. Early indications are that the Commission

has set aside less than two million euros to fund the entire programme, with around 200,000 euros earmarked for each of the four areas of activity. But sharing best practice and finding effective ways to optimise the use of limited resources are not cheap options – it takes time, effort and commitment to use these strategies successfully. Second, a collective effort is required: the European cancer community needs to commit to the programme, and Member States also need to get constructively engaged.

The presence of more than 70 stakeholders at the first working meeting of the Partnership – patient and advocacy groups, professional and industry bodies, public health organisations – indicates that support exists. The participation of representatives from 21 Member States was also encouraging – a handful committed themselves to supporting various areas of work, and others are expected to make similar pledges in the coming weeks.

Androulla Vassiliou, who deserves credit for getting the Partnership up and running, opened that meeting in her last public appearance as EU Health Commissioner. In a telling aside to her staff as she left the meeting she said, "This is a wonderful group of organisations, you must make sure you keep the momentum going." Let us hope we can all keep the momentum going, as the current enthusiasm and support can easily disappear if the Partnership gets bogged down in bureaucracy and lacks enough teeth to make a difference.