



UICC - taking on mission impossible

→ Franco Cavalli* ■ GUEST EDITOR

For almost 75 years the International Union Against Cancer (UICC) has been the only international non-governmental organisation dedicated exclusively to the global control of cancer. But with many societies currently 'going global', including ASCO and the American Association for Cancer Research, questions could be raised about whether the UICC is really needed anymore. I'm convinced it is.

We need the UICC to ensure that cancer achieves and retains priority status on the agenda of the main political bodies including the UN, G8, and the World Bank.

It was thanks in large part to sustained pressure from the UICC that last year the general assembly of the World Health Organization finally declared the fight against cancer as a priority. But despite this resolution, and despite cancer being a bigger killer than tuberculosis, malaria and HIV together, experience shows that governments won't act unless forced to by pressure of public opinion.

On a global scale, this level of pressure can be organised and channelled only through an established and representative non-governmental organisation (NGO) like the UICC.

People who are living in countries with more limited resources need the UICC today more than ever.

On top of the toll of poverty-related cancers, demographic changes are now leading to an upsurge in cancers related to western lifestyles. As a result, while globally cancer incidence is expected to increase by 50% over the next 15 years, most of that rise will be in the developing world, which by 2020 is expected to account for almost two-thirds of all new cases.

And because most of these people will have no access to screening, early diagnosis and appropriate treatments, they stand less chance of surviving. By 2020, for every one cancer death in an affluent country, three people will die in the developing world.

Finding ways to avert a catastrophic cancer epidemic may seem like an impossible mission, but having worked with the UICC for many years, I know that great things can be achieved when the whole oncology community pulls together. As incoming president, I accepted the heavy responsibility of leading this huge NGO, because I believe the UICC is the only body that can coordinate a successful global fight for cancer control. I see no reason why 'mission impossible' should be confined to the movie screen.

*Franco Cavalli is Director of the Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland, and will take on the presidency of the UICC at the World Cancer Conference, Washington, 8-12 July