

# EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF ONCOLOGY PHARMACY

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## **The competent human is the maxim and not the use of any device**

The demand to make working conditions humanely and to do everything possible to prevent harm to working people is an innate and humane vision of the modern era. To counteract this unbridled maximise profits, based on the destruction of human life force, is the noble task of all organisations that have the welfare of the people as goal.

We are very happy that the European Parliament is discussing in detail and will reach limits against senseless consumption of human life and working force. Professor Marja Sorsa together with Kai Falck et al published for the first time in Europe in *Lancet*<sup>1</sup> about the hazards of cytotoxic drugs to employees: 'Mutagenicity in urine of nurses handling cytostatic drugs'. In 1985 Marja Sorsa published further:

*“Many anticancer agents have been shown to be mutagenic, teratogenic and carcinogenic in experimental systems and second malignancies are known to be associated with several specific therapeutic treatments. Anticancer agents thus represent a class of occupational carcinogens, the handling of which should involve no unnecessary exposure.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Volume 313, Issue 8128, 9 June 1979, Pages 1250-1251;



Following the above, members of the European Society of Oncology Pharmacy (ESOP) launched in Europe its efforts to make work safer with cytostatics. The establishment of central production departments at the pharmacies of hospitals replaced increasingly unprotected work of nurses on the wards. ESOP is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 and anchored legally in Luxembourg. In addition to the 28 national organisations in Europe, 24 other countries are united beyond Europe with the goal that people suffering from cancer have to get the best possible support. ESOP has been working closely with the EU Commissioner for Health for years and has committed itself to take all necessary steps in prevention. This includes not only the question of maintaining healthy lifestyle but also preventive health for hazardous procedures.

In the Quality Standard for the pharmaceutical - oncological Service (QuapoS) we have reflected on the above issues and advocated measures in the last 20 years which have been written in 20 pages. QuapoS is now in its 5th version and has been translated by our affiliates in 28 languages and serves national health institutions in Europe as a guide.

We see great dangers for the members of healthcare teams if work practices, procedures and conditions are not implemented to obviate this concern. In QuapoS we describe these issues not only in terms of the best methods to support patients in their therapy, but also given instructions for the correct handling of the agents which should be regarded for working people as hazardous materials. QuapoS starts from the production site of the medicinal product in hospitals towards the correct and safe administration of the drugs on the ward to the patient.

This path is marked with the “Yellow Hand” for which we are asking the EU Commission to legislate the symbol in all EU member states. Aim of the “Yellow Hand” is to identify cytotoxic drugs which require safe handling procedures.

Another ongoing ESOP project involving 13 countries is targeting all healthcare personnel and cytotoxic drug contamination within hospitals. This project shows that the treatment process must be treated in a unified manner throughout all the process chain. One cannot avert from the dangers associated with handling



cytotoxic drugs. All healthcare staff throughout the supply chain need to be trained with specific emphasis on safe handling of cytotoxic drugs.

ESOP welcomes the work of the European Parliament in targeting working conditions and substances which could be a health concern for employees. The ultimate objective for health protection in addition to the establishment of protective working circumstances and conditions appears to us through the implementation of appropriate training and procedures. Based on the risk assessment and management QuapoS describes the whole method for the correct and safe handling of cytotoxic drugs:

*“The quality management represents the foundation for a definitive control of the processes in the preparation of cytostatic drugs. It is based on the risk analysis in the department. Controlled handling of the residual risk is connected to the analysis. The processes are continuously analysed and evaluated and solutions for risk control during drug preparation are found.”*

Dear Members of the European Parliament, the European Society of Oncology Pharmacy is willing and able to serve you on your way for safe working conditions in the field of cancer drugs. We have acted as Europeans for a strong European relationship since more than 20 years. We hope that you will recognise this strength and ask for our scientific support.

Yours sincerely,



Klaus Meier

*President ESOP  
Fellow of the European Academy of Cancer Sciences*