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Session 4: EC-funded projects in pediatric oncology

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1. Could you explain your focus on health research, please?

Let me underline that in our Research Framework Programme – and we are now in the 7th Framework Programme – the priority is definitely on children across all research themes and being in charge with many of my colleagues for the health research themes and the Directorate F, we do take care of pediatric oncology, for example. In our programme we are trying to of course addressing pediatric oncology, even with the budget limitations we have.

2. What are your focuses, your specific issues?

Part of this is work in progress, so I cannot talk about this, but as you have noticed from the previous call last year, we definitely address for example the off-label issue which is a very important issue in pediatric oncology, and we had already one call on this, the so-called Puma initiative as it is called. There will be more of these calls to follow.

3. Admission overrun is important in pediatric oncology, how do you really want to push these issues in health research?

We think that the off-label issue of course is a very important issue especially in pediatric oncology because, as we all know, most of the drugs that are used in the clinics today to treat children are not designed for children so we risk more toxicity reactions in children. We know that treatment options for children are limited because of this and we also know that for example with the limited number of drugs available and specifically designed for children we also have less optimal treatment strategies, so meaning in the end that more children will die of that disease so that definitely is an issue here.

4. The international networking is important in pediatric oncology regarding patient numbers. How do you support this?

So the other issue that you rightfully bring up is of course that each pediatric cancer is in fact a rare disease, a rare cancer, and we definitely need large numbers of these cases to be brought together, so that’s why we heavily support EU networks to make sure – and even beyond the EU – to make sure that we get to the critical number of cases to make sure that each clinical trial is a meaningful clinical trial.
5. And the young clinical trials, the networking – which activities are set in this context?

As far as I can tell and as I know is that there are of course initiatives ongoing, beyond the EU, we heard it also during this meeting, clinical trials are being launched as we speak of within Europe and with networks and institutions outside of Europe, for example the interferon trial that was mentioned this morning.