



European Society for Medical Oncology

World Health Organization releases vital policy tool to support ESMO-led multi-partner international survey

The delivery of adequate palliative care for cancer patients, including the effective management of cancer pain, is a major ESMO priority. ESMO is deeply concerned about the widespread prevalence of inadequately relieved cancer pain and is committed to educating clinicians and patients about how to best work together to achieve adequate relief. However, pain relief is only possible if the necessary tools are available, and the most important of these are opioid analgesics.

In collaboration with the European Association of Palliative Care, ESMO published a detailed report in the [March 2010 edition of Annals of Oncology](#) describing the widespread prevalence of unduly restrictive regulations that are impeding the availability and accessibility of strong pain medications for patients with cancer in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe. The report details the specific restrictions and the countries in which they are problematic. Sadly, the report highlighted a tragically high prevalence of restrictive laws and regulations in Eastern Europe and some of the Mediterranean countries.

ESMO has called for an urgent agenda of regulatory reform to address this tragic and unacceptable situation and it is also now spearheading a [major international research initiative](#) to evaluate the problem in the rest of the world. In this project, ESMO is collaborating with partner organizations including the European Association of Palliative Care, the International Program at the Pain and Policies Studies Group, University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center, the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Palliative Care Alliance, the Asia Pacific Hospice Palliative Care Network, the African Palliative Care Association, the Middle East Cancer Consortium, the International Association of Hospice and Palliative Care, the Latin American Association for Palliative Care, Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer (MASCC), the Indian Palliative Care Group and the Open Society Institute.

The World Health Organization and the International Narcotics Control Board share ESMO's concerns. To help the work of all who are lobbying for rational regulatory reform, they have published an update to their core document ["Ensuring balance in national policies on controlled substances: Guidance for availability and accessibility of controlled medicines."](#) They are collaborating in the ESMO-led survey on opioids since it will provide relevant worldwide data for both the WHO Access to Controlled Medications and Cancer Control Programs.

This WHO publication is a vital policy tool for all oncologists who are helping as advocates and lobbyists in the battle for regulatory reform to ensure that our patients can get access to the medication that they so desperately need to relieve pain.

Prof. Nathan Cherny
Chair, ESMO Palliative Care Working Group