

Under the Auspices of H.E. the President of the Hellenic Republic Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos

A new weapon in the battle against cancer; Athens based Comprehensive Cancer Research Center



The launch of the first **Comprehensive Cancer Research Center in Athens** (ACCC) was marked by a very successful scientific symposium that was held at NHRF on Friday December 8th, 2017. The aim of ACCC is to effectively contribute to the improvement of the life of the patients of this complex and heterogenous disease, through the reinforcement of **interdisciplinary research on cancer**.

The Center is an initiative of the **National Hellenic Research Foundation** (NHRF), and is implemented in collaboration with the **German Cancer Research Center** (DKFZ) and the **Helmholtz Association**, the largest research organization in the European Union. Various laboratories of Research Centers (NHRF, "Demokritos" Research Centre), the University of Athens, as well as selected public hospitals ("Alexandra" Hospital, "Agia Sophia" Childrens' Hospital, "Agios Savvas" Cancer Hospital, "Attikon" University Hospital, "G. Gennimatas" General Hospital) also participate in the initial phase of the ACCC. The initiative is supported by renowned scientists, such as Prof. M.A. Dimopoulos (Rector of University of Athens), Dr A. Pintzas (NHRF), Prof. E. Patsouris ("Laiko" Hospital), Prof. A. Bamias ("Alexandra" Hospital, University of Athens), and Prof. A. Kattamis ("Agia Sophia" Childrens' Hospital), Mrs. E. Panotopoulou ("Agios Savvas" Cancer Hospital). To name a few the Center's international Board of Advisors includes, among others, Prof. Harald zur Hausen (DKFZ, Nobel Prize for Medicine 2008), Prof. A. Dimitrakopoulou-Strauss (DKFZ) and Prof. P.T. Hammond (MIT, USA).

The ACCC began as a pilot project of the Helmholtz Association within the framework of the Helmholtz European Partnering Program, and was approved by an international Committee of experts on cancer. The main aspects of the collaboration will be, on the one hand, **joint research activities** with oncologists and researchers from various clinics in Athens, and,

on the other hand, a **scientist exchange program** from Athens to the DKFZ and from the DKFZ to research centers and oncology clinics in Athens.

This collaboration will combine the dynamics of the DKFZ, the largest center for biomedical research in Germany, the strong know-how of the Helmholtz Association as well as the multiple capabilities offered by Greek research centers, university departments and the large public health units in Athens and Attica which have nearly 50% of the beds available to patients in state hospitals.

The long-term goal of this initiative is the creation of a fully-equipped building which will host oncologists, surgeons, radiotherapists, imagers and bioscientists for molecular diagnosis and drug development, as well as researchers working on the molecular mechanisms of cancer for a comprehensive treatment of the disease. Starting from the ACCC, these technologically advanced services will be directly brought into the everyday clinical practice.

The aim is to achieve personalized therapy for each cancer patient, rapid rendering of research results into the clinic, and easy access to new drugs for cancer patients through clinical studies. **Great emphasis will also be placed on the prevention and early diagnosis of cancer**, which will contribute to the substantial improvement of the health of the country's citizens.

In the scientific symposium in the morning of December 8th 2017, the distinguished scientists from Greece and abroad presented the latest developments in the treatment of cancer and stressed out the necessity of developing such a Comprehensive Cancer Center in Greece.

Within the framework of the events for the launch of the ACCC, a gala dinner was held at the HILTON Athens Hotel, late in the afternoon of the same day, in the presence H.E. the President of the Hellenic Republic, Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos, who addressed the attendees. In his message, the President of the Hellenic Republic stressed that *"such efforts by so many important scientists from well known research centers show that today cancer is treated in a new way. Not only in terms of rehabilitation, whenever possible, but mainly by supporting people throughout this battle. In such cases the psychological support of the person is of enormous importance. This is what gives the power to the person to deal with the disease. This holistic confrontation - the way of treatment that goes beyond only medication that we know so far - shows that we are closer to a more effective treatment". In addition, "this kind of treatment is in line with our culture. Throughout Europe and not only. And it is our duty, within our culture to support people today. And you do it in the most ideal way, through medical science, for a disease that is a real challenge, in order to be able to highlight the element of our humanity. "*

Afterwards, **Dr. Vasilis Gregoriou, President of the National Hellenic Research Foundation (NHRF) and Administrative Director of ACCC**, in his inaugural speech, said: *"We are very glad that our vision for a holistic treatment of one of the most difficult diseases of our time is a reality in our country. It is a proof that strategic planning, synergies at national and European level, as well as the exploitation of the human potential can bring us tangible results. We hope that the establishment of this centre in Greece will strengthen research and will improve significantly the quality of life for the patients in our country "*.

Along the same lines, **Professor Dr. med. Dr. h. c. mult. Otmar D. Wiestler, President of the Helmholtz-Association**, said: *"I am very pleased for the establishment of the Comprehensive Cancer Research Center in Athens. Opening research across borders and exchanging researchers internationally, are essential elements in translational research into cancer. Thanks to this unique collaboration, we are uniting the best researchers from the partner centres in Germany and Greece, while at the same time we are creating a "pilot" within the framework of the new «Helmholtz European Partnering» Programme. We are determined to jointly create new and important channels for both research and cancer treatment. Our joint effort will also strengthen overall research in Europe, resulting in the advancement of our continent's competitiveness".*

Then, **Professor Dr. Josef Puchta, Administrative Director of the German DKFZ Cancer Research Center** (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum), referred to the challenges of the project: *"From our experience that we gathered when establishing the National Center for Tumor Diseases (NCT) Heidelberg, we knew very well that the road for the establishment of the ACCC would be long and challenging. I am very pleased that, within only one year, we have managed to advance the idea to a point where we can now announce the official start of this promising collaboration."*

Among the guests who were present at the gala dinner for the launch of the ACCC were the Minister of State, Mr. Alexandros Flampouraris, the Deputy Minister of Research and Innovation, Prof. Costas Fotakis, the Eminent Metropolitan of Nea Ionia and Philadelphia, Gabriel, members from "Nea Demokratia", political party Mr. Athanasios Bouras and Mrs. Maria Antoniou, Mr. George Mavrotas from "Potami" political party, Mrs. Evi Christofilopoulou from "Democratiki Symparataxi" political party, the Ambassador of Germany in Athens, Mr. Jens Plötner, Mr. Paschalis Apostolidis, the President of the Hellenic Association of Pharmaceutical Companies (SFEE), Mrs. Marina Horn representative of the German Ministry of Health, and many distinguished representatives from the scientific, medical and research areas.

The event was co-ordinated by the journalist, Mrs. Mary Pollalis.



