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Press Release

Patients with metastatic melanoma are without treatment

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The Hellenic Cancer Federation - ELLOK follows with great concern and anxiety the developments concerning the access of cancer patients to the treatments they need. One more time, the reservations that we have clearly, responsibly and publicly expressed in our letters to the political leadership of the Ministry of Health, have been confirmed, while following the "unclear practices" and the surprise moves used, leading to a blame game, in which no one is interested in the victims: the cancer patients!

In our press release of June 26, 2017, we referred to the problems raised by Article 89 of Law 4472/2017, as well as by subsequent regulations attempting to reduce the pharmaceutical expenditure, by blocking the import and reimbursement of new medicines with purely fiscal criteria, without taking into account medical criteria and patient needs.

Unfortunately, none of the five requests for a meeting that we have addressed so far to the Minister of Health was granted; however now, we are called, as representatives of civil society, to assist and address the results of impassable practices, approaches and decisions that did not respect and did not take into consideration the patients !!!

It is obvious even to the most skeptical that from this spring onwards, a new, obviously more unfavorable, landscape is shaping for cancer patients in our country.

"Fragmentation of measures, without any prior communication and consultation with cancer stakeholders, scientific medical societies and patients' representatives, raises serious questions and is a clear step backwards for cancer care in our country", we pointed out in our press release in June, re Law 4472/2017, warning that it would open the floodgates of uncertainty.

The result is that patients with metastatic or inoperable melanoma, a rare cancer with particularly poor prognosis, are at risk of remaining without the only treatment for a particular patient sub-group. Unfortunately, we cannot know the exact number of patients affected by the retraction decision of Roche, because Greece is one of the few EU member states, which do not have a population-based National Cancer Registry, but it is estimated that approx. 50 patients are already in treatment.

The retraction of its approved medicine by Roche from the positive list (reimbursable medicines) is clearly an extremely negative development for cancer patients in our country, which we fear is just the tip of the iceberg. In addition to the regulatory and legal framework, ethics, corporate social responsibility and political responsibility require that the leadership of the Ministry of Health and Roche convene without any delay to immediately find a solution for the continuation of the treatment of the patients, who are already receiving it, until their treatment is completed, without any additional financial charge, but also to assure the medicine's availability to those patients who will need it in the future, as for these melanoma patients there is no time to lose nor alternative treatment options.

We cannot accept that once more, after 2012, cancer patients are held hostages in industry and state power and blame games. We are citizens of a reputable country, and we demand that the Article 5 para. (5) of the Hellenic Constitution "Everyone has the right to the protection of his or her health" applies.

We also expect the Minister of Health to prove the same credibility and responsibility, which he demonstrates in his statement, for equally serious, key therapies that as per provisions of Law 4472/2017, are or will be excluded from the positive list (reimbursed medicines)

We request that the Minister of Health

- proceeds to the immediate exclusion of patient groups, as the one making the object of the present, i.e. patients with rare or metastatic cancer, for which there is no other treatment option, from the provisions of article 89 of Law 4472/17.
- At the same time, we are asking for the institutionalization of our participation in the Medicines Pricing Committee, and we are willing to make every effort to contribute for finding a solution to the problem. Since our establishment, we have stated that the role of ELLOC is to seek synthesis of ideas and good collaboration with the political leadership of the Ministry of Health and other oncology stakeholders.

About ELLOK

The Hellenic Cancer Federation was legally registered in 2016, as the federation (umbrella organization) of cancer patient associations in Greece. It was in informal operation since 2011, under the name DEDIDIKA. Today, the Hellenic Cancer Federation represents 28 cancer patient organisations covering all cancers from all over Greece.



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ
ΟΜΟΣΠΟΝΔΙΑ
ΚΑΡΚΙΝΟΥ

The goal of ELLOK is to unite patients, their caregivers, healthcare professionals, cancer hospitals, politicians, the media and the public, towards the improvement of cancer care, cancer prevention, cancer survivorship, rehabilitation and reintegration of cancer patients into social life and work. We advocate for individual and collective rights of cancer patients, their carers and families, and for universal access to cancer and health care (www.ellok.org).

You can find our press release dd 26.6.2017 re “The new law 4472/2017 and the approval and reimbursement of new cancer medicines” at https://ellok.org/deltio_typou_nomos44722017/

About Cotellic

Cotellic is a cancer medicine used to treat adults with melanoma (a type of skin cancer) that has spread to other parts of the body or cannot be surgically removed. Cotellic is used in combination with another medicine called vemurafenib. It is only for patients whose melanoma tumour cells have been shown to have a specific mutation (change) in the BRAF gene called ‘BRAF V600’.

Cotellic contains the active substance cobimetinib.

About metastatic melanoma

Metastatic melanoma, also known as Stage IV melanoma, is used when melanoma cells of any kind (cutaneous, mucosal or ocular) have spread through the lymph nodes to distant sites in the body and/or to the body's organs. The liver, lungs, bones and brain are most often affected by these metastases. IV Stage melanomas are not easily treated, because they have already travelled to distant parts of the body. Symptomatic skin tumors or swollen lymph nodes are often operable or can be subjected to radiotherapy.