

CAREFOR calls on EU to safeguard independent academic research

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How can we benefit from non-commercial clinical research?



What is academic research? Credit: European Society for Medical Oncology

Three leading European organisations in the fight against cancer have called the EU to urgently increase its support for independent academic research for the benefit of cancer patients, in an article published (today) in *ESMO Open*.

"Independent academic research is endangered for lack of funds and adequate legislation," said Rolf A. Stahel, ESMO Past President and co-founder of the CAREFOR platform. "Working closely with EU

institutions, we can make sure Europe is equipped with efficient legal framework and a vision to become the best place for research and innovation, for the ultimate benefit of [cancer](#) patients," he stated.

CAREFOR (the Clinical Academic Cancer Research Forum) is a joint initiative by the European Association for Cancer Research (EACR), the European Organisation for the Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC), and the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO). In this paper, they address the funding and regulatory challenges faced by academic researchers, as well as the need to foster collaborative cancer research by developing novel approaches to [clinical trials](#).

How can we benefit from non-commercial clinical research?

The CAREFOR paper explains that the three main areas that would benefit from academic research are: personalised medicine, patient-centred innovation and rare cancer patients. "Cancer is a complex disease that continuously evolves under treatment. New discoveries have revealed that there are an enormous number of cancer subtypes, which each present unique characteristics. A combination of basic and clinical research will play an increasingly important role in the development of tailored treatment options leading to improved therapeutic strategies," explains Richard Marais, EACR Past President.

"With 3.2 million new cases of cancer per year and considering the increasing number of patients with rare conditions, non-commercial research is essential as it has the potential to optimise therapeutic strategies for frequent tumours and address the unmet needs of rare [cancer patients](#) through the use of new methodologies for evidence generation and evaluation. Independent researchers address pragmatic questions critically relevant to treat patients in real life, including—but

not limited to—combination of treatments and treatment duration, thus taking into account medical value and clinical relevance of treatments," explains Denis Lacombe, EORTC Director General.

The CAREFOR paper states that independent collaborative research platforms are in the best position to optimise knowledge development. This approach would help to switch from a traditional drug-centered research and approval process to a truly patient-centered approach. "The aim is to find the trial that fits the patient, rather than finding the patient fit for the trial," said Stahel. "To achieve this, it is fundamental that existing challenges faced by independent academic researchers are solved."

"Key issues that we are calling EU institutions to address include: appropriate implementation of the Clinical Trials and Data Protection Regulations; the need for funding for independent research; and the need to foster academic collaborative environments," explained Stahel. "We are also calling for a common EU database to track all clinical trials in Europe."

Other critical issues addressed in the CAREFOR paper include: the affordability of cancer care; the need for independent, collaborative and quality biobanks; the acceptance of new methodologies for evidence generation and evaluation, and the use and protection of electronic patient data.

"The bottom line is that academic and independent research helps to save time, lower costs, accelerate commercial drug development and improve access for [patients](#)," concludes Stahel.

More information: *ESMO Open*, [DOI: 10.1136/esmooopen-2017-000187](#)

Provided by European Society for Medical Oncology

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