

SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM

**Hot Topics in Oncology and Cancer
Research: From Research Excellence
to a Functional National
Cancer Mission Hub**



63rd Bratislava Oncology Days



October 1st, 2026

11:00 – 12:30 (CET)



Radisson Blu Carlton Hotel,

Bratislava, Slovakia + **online**

Chairs: S. Čierniková, M. Rečková, M. Mego, J. Sedlák

ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Soňa Čierniková, PhD., MPH

Coordinator of the ECHoS activities in Slovakia
Research and Education Project Coordinator
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Scientific Group Leader, Cancer Research
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Slovak Academy of Sciences
Member of the Board of Trustees, Slovak
Cancer Research Foundation



Dear distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, dear speakers, and participants,

*It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the symposium **“Hot Topics in Oncology and Cancer Research: From Research Excellence to a Functional National Cancer Mission Hub”**, held as part of the **63rd Bratislava Oncology Day**.*

This symposium comes at an important moment for Slovak oncology. The increasing complexity and burden of cancer require closer coordination and connections between excellent research, innovation, clinical care, health policy, patients, and society. For this reason, we have organised this symposium to bring together different perspectives and open a discussion about how we can strengthen these connections and further develop the Slovak cancer ecosystem.

*Over the past years, Slovakia has become actively involved in European initiatives supporting the integration of research and education into cancer care. One of these was the **ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: Networks and Synergies**, in which Slovakia was represented by the National Cancer Institute/National Oncology Institute and the Slovak Cancer Research Foundation. Building on the experience, partnerships and foundations established through this work, Slovakia is now entering a new phase with the ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies.*

From my experience as a translational cancer researcher, I see how important it is to translate research results into clinical practice and meaningful outcomes for patients. This is why

63rd Bratislava Oncology Days October 1st, 2026, Bratislava, Slovakia

*I see the idea of the **National Cancer Mission Hub** as a natural next step. It can create a space where all relevant stakeholders can meet, communicate, and work together. It can help connect research with clinical practice, support innovation, strengthen patient involvement, and create new opportunities for collaboration both nationally and across Europe.*

*Establishing **Slovak National Cancer Mission Hub** is not only about creating another structure. Its real value will depend on whether it becomes a functional and active platform that responds to the needs of the cancer community and, most importantly, contributes to better outcomes for patients. This is also why building the **European Network of National Cancer Mission Hubs** is so important. By connecting these national hubs, we can learn from one another, share experience and expertise, develop new ideas and partnerships, and strengthen our collective contribution to the EU Mission on Cancer. For Slovakia, this is an opportunity to be an active part of this emerging European community and to bring our priorities, expertise and the needs of our patients to the European level.*

*Today's programme brings together the perspectives of the European Commission, the ECHO^S initiative, Slovak cancer research and international experience with Cancer Mission Hubs. We would like to use this opportunity to introduce the idea of establishing an **National Cancer Mission Hub** in Slovakia, put it into the wider European context, and show how similar initiatives are taking shape in other countries.*

I hope that symposium will provide inspiration and remind us that together we are stronger, and TOGETHER we can move Slovak oncology forward. Because, ultimately, this is not about plans or strategies; it is about improving the lives of people living with cancer and their close ones. And we can achieve this only if we keep patients at the heart of every decision we make.

Thank you, and I wish you a fruitful and inspiring symposium, and I look forward to continued collaboration.

ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



Mária Rečková, M.D., PhD.

Co-coordinator of the ECHoS
activities in Slovakia
Medical Guarantor
National Oncology Institute,
National Cancer Institute, Bratislava
Clinical oncologist, POKO Poprad



Dear colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to today's symposium and to join this important discussion on the future of cancer research and care in Slovakia.

As an oncologist, researcher, and former Director of the National Oncology Institute, I have had the opportunity to see how much can be achieved when clinical expertise, scientific knowledge, institutional leadership, and a shared commitment to patients come together. I have also seen that the challenges we face in oncology are too complex to be addressed by any single institution, profession, or sector acting alone.

*This understanding was an important motivation for the participation of the National Oncology Institute in the ECHoS project. The project has enabled us to become part of a wider European effort to establish **National Cancer Mission Hubs** and to strengthen co-operation across research, healthcare, policy, innovation, and society. We are pleased that this work is continuing in the next phase, ECHoS 2, allowing us to build on the experience, relationships, and ideas developed so far.*

The National Cancer Mission Hub should not be perceived merely as a new organisational structure. Its true purpose is to create a functional ecosystem: a space that connects all relevant stakeholders, encourages open communication, and enables genuine teamwork. Researchers, clinicians, policymakers, patients and their representatives, public institutions, professional organisations, innovators, and other partners all bring essential

63rd Bratislava Oncology Days October 1st, 2026, Bratislava, Slovakia

perspectives. The value of the Hub will lie in its ability to transform these perspectives into coordinated action.

To achieve this, however, structures and formal agreements will not be enough. We also need the right mindset across institutions and society. We need a culture of trust, openness, shared responsibility, and willingness to cooperate beyond traditional professional and institutional boundaries. A common mission can succeed only when it is understood as a shared endeavour—one in which individual contributions support a goal greater than any single organisation could achieve on its own.

*The emerging **European network of the National Cancer Mission Hubs** offers Slovakia an important opportunity. It can help us learn from the experience of other countries, share our own expertise, create new partnerships, and participate actively in shaping European approaches to cancer research and care. At the same time, it can help us translate European ambitions into solutions that respond to the specific needs of patients and professionals in Slovakia.*

I believe that the National Oncology Institute, together with its partners, can play an important role in this process. Our common objective should be to create an environment in which excellent research leads more effectively to innovation, innovation reaches clinical practice, and progress is reflected in better prevention, treatment, quality of life, and outcomes for patients.

*I hope that this symposium will contribute not only to exchanging knowledge, but also to strengthening the relationships and shared determination needed to turn the vision of a **Slovak National Cancer Mission Hub** into a sustainable and meaningful reality.*

ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



Prof. Michal Mego, M.D., D.Sc.

Chief expert of the MoH SR
for Clinical Oncology
Head of the II. Oncology Clinic
of the Faculty of Medicine of Comenius
University and National Cancer Institute



Dear colleagues, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

*it is a great pleasure to welcome you to Bratislava and to the 63rd Bratislava Oncology Days, and particularly to today's symposium, **Hot Topics in Oncology and Cancer Research: From Research Excellence to a Functional National Cancer Mission Hub.***

As a clinical oncologist, I would like to add one very simple perspective to today's discussion.

In oncology, we are witnessing extraordinary progress. We understand cancer biology better than ever before. We have new molecular technologies, increasingly precise diagnostics, new drugs, and new possibilities for prevention and early detection. Yet, for our patients, scientific progress has real value only when it reaches clinical practice. And this remains one of our greatest challenges.

*The distance between a scientific discovery and a tangible benefit for a patient can still be surprisingly long. Closing this gap requires more than excellent science and more than excellent medicine. It requires researchers, clinicians, healthcare institutions, policymakers, patients, industry, and society to work together. This is why I believe the concept of the **National Cancer Mission Hub** is particularly important for Slovakia. We do not necessarily need another institution. What we need is a functional environment in which people and organisations that already have expertise, ideas and responsibility can connect more effectively, define common priorities and turn them into action.*

63rd Bratislava Oncology Days

October 1st, 2026, Bratislava, Slovakia

*In my role as Chief Expert of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic for Clinical Oncology, I am particularly aware that advances in research and clinical practice must also be reflected in strategic decisions and health policies. Effective policy requires reliable evidence, an understanding of clinical reality, and continuous dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. **The National Cancer Mission Hub** could become an important environment for such dialogue and help translate professional expertise into sustainable systemic solutions.*

Slovakia has excellent scientists, strong clinical teams and many successful examples of international collaboration. Our challenge is to connect these strengths into a sustainable ecosystem in which research, innovation and clinical care reinforce each other.

I therefore see today's symposium not only as an opportunity to discuss the European Cancer Mission or the ECHoS project, but also as an opportunity to ask ourselves a very practical question:

How can we work together better so that progress in cancer research translates faster into better prevention, better treatment and better lives for our patients?

I am very pleased that today we can hear perspectives from the European Commission, from the ECHoS initiative, from Slovak cancer research and from colleagues who have already gained practical experience with Cancer Mission Hubs in other countries. I hope their experience will inspire us — but also encourage us to find a model that reflects the specific needs and strengths of Slovakia.

Because ultimately, the success of a Cancer Mission Hub will not be measured by its organisational structure, the number of meetings it holds, or the documents it produces. It will be measured by whether it helps us achieve better outcomes for people affected by cancer.

Thank you very much, and I wish you an inspiring symposium.

ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



Dr. Ján Sedlák, DSc.

Chair of the Board of Trustees,
Slovak Cancer Research Foundation
Senior Cancer Researcher,
Cancer Research Institute, Biomedical
Research Center of the Slovak
Academy of Sciences



Dear attendees,

*I am very pleased to be with you at the symposium Hot Topics in Oncology and Cancer Research, held as part of the 63rd Bratislava Oncology Days. In its subtitle, this year's event emphasizes the need for excellent research as a foundation on the path towards a functioning **National Cancer Mission Hub**.*

The outcome of our joint efforts should be more than merely the sum of individual contributions. This principle was one of the reasons why the Slovak Cancer Research Foundation accepted the offer of the National Oncology Institute to participate in the ECHoS project, whose aim is to create a space for transdisciplinary collaboration between scientists and clinicians in order to improve patients' quality of life.

This idea is fully in line with the long-standing tradition of the Integrative Oncology conferences organized by the Foundation, which bring together experts not only from disciplines working in "wet" laboratories, but also from the social sciences and humanities, as well as from engineering and other technological fields.

In the broader understanding of the term Integrative Oncology, this also includes raising public awareness of the importance of cancer prevention in all its forms, while emphasizing the role of research into prehabilitation and its integration into the cancer treatment process.

Just as there are regional inequalities in healthcare in Slovakia, similar inequalities exist in other EU Member States, as well as between

63rd Bratislava Oncology Days October 1st, 2026, Bratislava, Slovakia

Member States themselves. Therefore, the ambition of the ECHoS project to establish a **European network of National Cancer Mission Hubs** is a significant undertaking. It will facilitate the sharing of examples of good practice and contribute to achieving the objectives of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan 2030.

The structure and operational model of the national hubs will depend on the stakeholders and circumstances in each individual country, ranging from coordinated national action and consortia to legal entities and joint ventures. One key element, however, should be taken into account in all these structures: the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. For this reason, we strongly support the National Oncology Institute in its efforts to establish the **Slovak National Cancer Mission Hub**.

Recently, **Vision Slovakia 2040** was ceremonially presented at Bratislava Castle. The Cancer Mission is one of the five major missions of the Horizon Europe programme. I hope that the National Cancer Mission Hub, which will become part of the European network, will have a place within this strategy, given its potential to make a significant contribution to improving the quality of life of the people of Slovakia.

In conclusion, I would like to express my hope that one of the priorities of the stakeholders involved in the **National Cancer Mission Hub** will be the education of the young generation about responsible choices and actions for their own health, as well as creating the conditions for, and actively encouraging, young talent to pursue a career in science.

Thank you.

ECHoS project – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



National Cancer Institute in Bratislava

is a specialized hospital providing comprehensive oncological healthcare, including inpatient and outpatient care, diagnostic and treatment services, and intensive care across relevant medical specialties. It also serves as a coordinating centre for oncology care in Slovakia, providing methodological guidance and coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating the professional standards of oncology care nationwide. The National Cancer Institute provides oncology consultations for healthcare facilities, contributes to cancer prevention, and assesses the quality and professional standards of cancer care across the Slovak Republic. In the field of research and development, it participates in clinical trials and contributes to the education and training of cancer researchers and healthcare professionals. Importantly, the National Cancer Institute cooperates with other healthcare, academic, and scientific institutions at both national and international levels.



National Oncology Institute

serves as a clinical research, academic, and educational platform. Its main mission is to contribute comprehensively and independently to the implementation of the goals of the National Oncology Programme, in cooperation with other stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic, across five key areas: primary prevention, screening, diagnosis and treatment, research and development, and the use of health data and information. In the field of research and education, the Institute has established the Cancer Trials Register in Slovakia and regularly announces calls for grant applications for short-term international fellowships for physicians working in oncology.



Biomedical Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

is the largest Slovak institution devoted to basic and applied research in biomedical sciences. BMC SAS was officially established on January 1st 2016, by the merger of four previously independent SAS institutes, including the Cancer Research Institute, the Institute of Clinical and Translational Research, the Institute of Experimental Endocrinology, and the Institute of Virology. The principal mission of is to foster research excellence, develop interdisciplinary approaches, and stimulate innovative potential for the improvement of our knowledge on human diseases, their better translation to the clinic, and more effective practical use for the benefit of patients and the entire society. BMC SAS research is focused on understanding metabolic, neuroendocrine, autoimmune, and cardiovascular disorders, cancer, and infections, and their interrelationships when co-occurring in the same organisms.



Slovak Cancer Research Foundation

is a non-profit organisation established in 1993. Its Board of Trustees consists of scientists in cancer research. It supports and promotes cancer research at all levels, including basic, translational, and clinical research, with the aim of translating research findings into clinical practice. The Foundation collaborates with leading clinical oncology institutions across Slovakia and supports the development of clinically oriented translational research, including research on quality of life. Its activities contribute to making cancer repeatedly treatable and to fostering acceptance among both the general public and the professional community, the oncology science and research as an integral part of the fight against cancer.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM

Hot Topics in Oncology and Cancer Research: From Research Excellence to a Functional National Cancer Mission Hub

*Chairs: Assoc. Prof. Soňa Čierniková, PhD., MPH; Mária Rečková, M.D., PhD.;
Prof. Michal Mego, M.D., DSc; Dr. Ján Sedlák, DSc.*

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| 11.00 – 11.05 | Opening |
| 11.05 – 11.10 | A message from a representative of the European Commission on Building the Network of National Cancer Mission Hubs
Annika Nowak , Head of Sector, Cancer Mission Secretariat,
DG Research and Innovation, European Commission (Belgium, online) |
| 11.10 – 11.35 | The Slovak Cancer Research Landscape: Achievements, Challenges and Future Directions (Plenary lecture)
Prof. Dr. Silvia Pastoreková, DSc. , General Director, Biomedical
Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences |
| 11.35 – 11.50 | The ECHoS project, from idea to implementation. The role of NCMHs in the implementation of EU Mission on Cancer
Hugo Soares, PhD. , Co-coordinator of the ECHoS project,
AICIB – The Portuguese Agency for Clinical Research and Biomedical
Innovation (Portugal, online) |
| 11.50 – 12.05 | National Cancer Mission Hub: Fostering collaboration between cancer research, innovation and care - Importance and benefits for Slovakia
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Soňa Čierniková, PhD., MPH , Scientific Group
Leader and Research and Education Project Coordinator, National
Oncology Institute, Bratislava; Cancer Research Institute, Biomedical
Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences; Member of the
Board of Trustees, Slovak Cancer Research Foundation (Slovakia) |
| 12.05 – 12.20 | Mission-Oriented Leadership and Pentahelix Collaboration for Health System Readiness - Learnings from the Swedish prototype Vision Zero Cancer and the establishment of SweCan – Sweden's Cancer Mission Hub
Ebba Hallersjö Hult, MSc. , Senior Advisor, Stockholm School of
Economics, Programme Director, Testbed Sweden Precision Health
Cancer (Sweden) |
| 12.20 – 12.30 | Discussion and closing remarks |

INTRODUCING THE PANEL OF EXPERTS



Annika Nowak

*Head of Sector, Cancer Mission Secretariat,
DG Research and Innovation, European Commission,
Brussels, Belgium*

After studying law at Humboldt University in Berlin, Annika Nowak started her professional career as a parliamentary assistant at the European Parliament in Brussels (2001-2004). In 2004, she joined DG Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) of the European Commission and worked primarily in the field of health policy and pharmaceutical law, including as a Cabinet member of the Health Commissioner (2014-2019). In 2019, Ms. Nowak moved to DG Research and Innovation (DG RTD) to work on health research. Since July 2021, she is the Head of Sector of the Cancer Mission secretariat in DG RTD Unit D1 'Combatting Diseases'.

INTRODUCING THE PANEL OF EXPERTS



Prof. Dr. Silvia Pastoreková, DSc.

*General Director, Biomedical Research Center
of the Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Bratislava, Slovakia*

Prof. Silvia Pastorekova is a senior scientist at the Biomedical Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (BMC SAS) in Bratislava, Slovakia (ResearcherID: C-6685-2018). Her research has focused on cancer biology, particularly on the mechanisms by which cancer cells adapt to hypoxia and acidosis in the tumour microenvironment and how these processes contribute to tumour progression, metastasis, and therapy resistance.



She is internationally recognized for her pioneering work on carbonic anhydrase IX (CA IX), a hypoxia-regulated tumour-associated protein that she and her colleagues identified and extensively characterized as a clinically relevant biomarker of tumour hypoxia and an attractive target for cancer therapy. This work has contributed significantly to the understanding of tumour adaptation to hostile microenvironmental conditions and has supported the development of CA IX-targeted diagnostic and therapeutic approaches.

Prof. Pastorekova currently serves as Director General of the Biomedical Research Center SAS, the largest biomedical research institution in Slovakia. In this role, she is actively involved in shaping national research strategies, promoting research excellence, fostering interdisciplinary and translational research, and strengthening links between basic science, clinical medicine and innovation. Her interests extend to research governance, research culture, capacity building, evaluation of scientific impact, and the development of sustainable research ecosystems that deliver tangible benefits for society and public health.

INTRODUCING THE PANEL OF EXPERTS



Hugo Soares, PhD.

Science Manager at AICIB

*– The Portuguese Agency for Clinical Research
and Biomedical Innovation & Co-coordinator,
ECHO-S Project, Lisbon, Portugal*

Working in the interface between science and society, Hugo co-coordinates the European project ECHO-S, aiming at creating a network of support for the EU Mission on Cancer and the European project TRANCAN-4, a network of funding organizations dedicated to translational cancer research. Two European networks of more than 90 partners, combined, devoted to make cancer research and policy more aligned with citizens and societal needs.

In addition to the work at the European level, Hugo also coordinates the Portuguese Cancer Mission Hub (NCH-PT), a structure dedicated to connecting people and organizations to foster the translation of scientific evidence into policies. Hugo is oriented towards the implementation of the EU Mission on Cancer and EBCP initiatives in the full spectrum of cancer - from fundamental research to clinical research and clinical practice – in Portugal. The NCH-PT is composed of a Policy Group, a Stakeholders Group and a Citizens and Patients' Forum and organizes an annual call for projects to fund collaborative projects in cancer.

Hugo holds a PhD in Biotechnology from NOVA University of Lisbon

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INTRODUCING THE PANEL OF EXPERTS



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Soňa Čierniková, PhD., MPH

*Coordinator of the ECHO-S activities in Slovakia
Research and Education Project Coordinator
National Oncology Institute, National Cancer Institute, Bratislava
Scientific Group Leader, Cancer Research Institute, Biomedical
Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences
Member of the Board of Trustees, Slovak Cancer Research Foundation*

Sona Čierniková holds the position of Research and Education Project Coordinator at the National Oncology Institute (NOI) and Secretary of the Scientific Council of NOI. She collaborates closely with the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic to fulfill the goals of the National Oncology Program of the Slovak Republic.



In her scientific work at the Cancer Research Institute of the Biomedical Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, she focuses primarily on biomedical research in oncogenetics and the role of the microbiome in cancer patients, with the potential to translate scientific knowledge into clinical practice.



At the international level, she participates in initiatives with the WHO, IARC, and UICC. Sona Čierniková is a member of the EU expert group on the Mission on Cancer Configuration of the Horizon Europe Programme Committee, a member of the Sub-group on Cancer under the Expert Group on Public Health, and a member of the Steering Committee and the Policy Board of the EUnetCCC-JA. Currently, she is involved in efforts to reduce disparities in cancer research, innovation, and access to quality care across CEE countries and contribute to various projects aiming to fulfill the goals of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. In Slovakia, she coordinates or co-coordinates several European projects related to comprehensive cancer care and the establishment of the National Cancer Mission Hubs.



As a long-time member of the Slovak Cancer Research Foundation, she disseminates the results of cancer research for the scientific community, patients, and the general public. Importantly, the issue of primary cancer prevention is very close to her, so she participates in scientific-educational workshops at high schools to raise awareness of cancer in young people. Currently, she closely cooperates with the cancer patient organisations and devotes a significant effort to active and meaningful patient involvement and empowerment in cancer research and care.

INTRODUCING THE PANEL OF EXPERTS



Ebba Hallersjö Hult, MSc.

*Senior Advisor, Stockholm School of Economics
Programme Director, Testbed Sweden
Precision Health Cancer*

Ebba Hallersjö Hult is an internationally recognised leader in cancer policy, precision medicine, health system transformation, and mission-oriented innovation. She serves as Senior Advisor at the Stockholm School of Economics and leads Testbed Sweden Precision Health Cancer, a national innovation platform established by Vision Zero Cancer, Genomic Medicine Sweden, and SciLife-Lab to accelerate the implementation of precision medicine and patient-centred cancer care.



As co-founder of Vision Zero Cancer and a driving force behind Testbed Sweden Precision Health Cancer and FOCUS.E, Ebba has built and mobilised multi-stakeholder ecosystems that bring together academia, healthcare, industry, government, patient organisations, and investors to accelerate innovation and improve cancer outcomes. Her work focuses on shaping policy, strengthening health system readiness, and fostering sustainable public-private partnerships that translate scientific advances into tangible benefits for patients and society.

At the European level, Ebba plays an active role in advancing the EU Cancer Mission and the personalised medicine agenda. She contributes to Horizon Europe's ECHoS (Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs), where Vision Zero Cancer has served as a model for the development of Cancer Mission Hubs across Europe, and to the Joint Action on Personalised Cancer Medicine (JAPCM), supporting the integration of personalised cancer care into national health systems. She has also contributed to several major European initiatives, including PCM4EU, PRIME-ROSE, PRECISEU, and EUnetCCC.

Ebba serves on the Boards of All.Can International and All.Can Sweden, helping advance the global agenda for value-based, patient-centred cancer care by promoting more efficient use of resources and better outcomes for patients. A strong advocate for mission-oriented innovation and cross-sector collaboration, she works to ensure that scientific breakthroughs are translated into equitable, sustainable, and future-ready cancer systems.



National Cancer Mission Hub: Fostering collaboration between cancer research, innovation, and care - Importance and benefits for Slovakia

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Soňa Čierniková, PhD., MPH

Coordinator of the ECHoS activities in Slovakia

Research and Education Project Coordinator

National Oncology Institute, National Cancer Institute, Bratislava

Scientific Group Leader, Cancer Research Institute, Biomedical

Research Center of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

Member of the Board of Trustees, Slovak Cancer Research Foundation

The growing burden of cancer requires an integrated approach connecting clinical care, scientific innovation, and health policy. National Cancer Mission Hubs, established through the European initiative ECHoS (*Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: Networks and Synergies*), provide an important mechanism for translating the objectives of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and the EU Mission on Cancer into national contexts. The ECHoS consortium brought together 58 organisations from 28 countries, with Slovakia represented by the National Cancer Institute/National Oncology Institute and the Slovak Cancer Research Foundation.

For Slovakia, the establishment of a National Cancer Mission Hub could represent a unique opportunity to create a sustainable national platform bringing together key stakeholders across the cancer ecosystem, including healthcare providers, research institutions, policymakers, patient organisations, society, industry, and other relevant stakeholders. Such a Hub could strengthen the coordination of national cancer-related activities, facilitate the translation of research and innovation into clinical practice, support cross-sector collaboration, and create stronger links between national priorities and the broader European Cancer Mission community. A well-established National Cancer Mission Hub could contribute to better alignment of national priorities with European strategies, more coordinated cancer care and re-

ABSTRACTS OF LECTURES (in alphabetical order)

search, and greater capacity to address inequalities and emerging challenges in cancer control.

Active participation of Slovak representatives in key ECHoS activities, including the Knowledge Exchange Program, has supported the sharing of national challenges and best practices and contributed to the development of implementation strategies. As the initiative enters its next strategic phase through ECHoS – Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: Beyond Networks and Synergies, the focus is shifting towards establishing a structured European Network of National Cancer Mission Hubs. This network will strengthen cross-border collaboration, support joint research activities, facilitate policy dialogue, and enable systematic knowledge exchange across participating countries.

In this context, establishing a Slovak NCMH represents an important opportunity not only to further develop a national platform, but also to strengthen Slovakia's links with the emerging European Network of National Cancer Mission Hubs. It would help ensure that Slovak priorities, expertise, and patient needs are represented at the European level. Ultimately, a strong and sustainable National Cancer Mission Hub could become an important connecting mechanism between research, innovation, healthcare, policy, industry, patients, and society, supporting the implementation of the EU Mission on Cancer in Slovakia and, most importantly, contributing to better outcomes and a better quality of life for people living with cancer.

This work was supported by the ECHoS project – *Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies*, funded under the Horizon Europe Mission on Cancer.



Mission-Oriented Leadership and Pentahelix Collaboration for Health System Readiness - Learnings from the Swedish prototype Vision Zero Cancer and the establishment of SweCan – Sweden's Cancer Mission Hub

Ebba Hallersjö Hult, MSc.

Senior Advisor, Stockholm School of Economics

Programme Director, Testbed Sweden Precision Health Cancer

Across Europe, we have extraordinary advances in cancer research, data, diagnostics and treatment. Yet innovation still does not reach all patients fast enough. The challenge is increasingly not a lack of knowledge or innovation, but a lack of alignment and health-system readiness for implementation.

This presentation draws on the Swedish experience of Vision Zero Cancer, launched in 2019 as a mission-oriented innovation initiative with the ambition to eliminate cancer as a cause of death, and its evolution towards SweCan – Sweden's Cancer Mission Hub. Rather than starting with a new organisational structure, Vision Zero Cancer started with a shared purpose and the question of how to align actors across the system so that research and innovation could reach patients faster. A pentahelix model brought together healthcare, academia, industry, policymakers and patients in a voluntary "coalition of the willing".

The Swedish experience highlights the importance of a different form of leadership for complex health-system transformation. Mission-oriented leadership is less about hierarchy and control and more about orchestration: creating shared direction, mobilising actors who control different parts of the system, building trust across organisational and sectoral boundaries, and enabling action despite uncertainty. Shared values - courage, trust

ABSTRACTS OF LECTURES (in alphabetical order)

and power to act - provided a foundation for distributed leadership and a principle-based governance model.

Over time, this ecosystem enabled concrete experimentation. Together with Genomic Medicine Sweden and SciLifeLab, Vision Zero Cancer establish Testbed Sweden Precision Health Cancer as a national system demonstrator, creating an environment in which healthcare, research, industry, authorities and patients could work together in the reality of cancer care. The experience illustrates how a mission-oriented ecosystem can move from shared vision, to experimentation, to structures capable of supporting implementation and scale.

A central lesson is that collaboration alone is not enough. Pentahelix collaboration creates value when it moves from dialogue to joint responsibility for implementation. Likewise, patient involvement must move beyond consultation towards

co-design and ultimately co-decision embedded in governance, prioritisation and evaluation.

The Swedish journey from Vision Zero Cancer to SweCan demonstrates how mission-oriented initiatives can evolve from prototypes into national capabilities. It also points to a wider role for National Cancer Mission Hubs across Europe: not as another organisational layer, but as platforms where alignment happens, implementation is owned, and actors collectively build the conditions for innovation to be adopted and scaled.

The key challenge is therefore to move from project logic to system logic. Europe is good at generating initiatives and pilots, but sustainable impact requires designing for implementation from the start. Cancer Mission Hubs can become the bridge between innovation and implementation—helping transform successful experiments into institutionalised practice and, ultimately, better outcomes for patients.



The Slovak Cancer Research Landscape: Achievements, Challenges and Future Directions

Prof. Dr. Silvia Pastoreková, DSc.

*General Director, Biomedical Research Center
of the Slovak Academy of Sciences*

Cancer remains one of the leading health challenges in Slovakia. Despite substantial progress in cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment, cancer mortality in Slovakia remains above the European Union average, particularly for colorectal and lung cancers. These challenges highlight the importance of strong and well-coordinated cancer research capable of generating scientific discoveries and translating them into improved patient outcomes.

The lecture will provide an overview of the contemporary cancer research landscape in Slovakia, spanning academic institutions, clinical centres and the private sector. Particular attention will be devoted to the role of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Biomedical Research Center SAS, and will also highlight contributions from universities, the National Cancer Institute, other clinical oncology centres, biobanking infrastructures and innovative biotechnology companies involved in translational oncology and precision medicine. Selected examples of Slovak scientific excellence will illustrate the successful translation of fundamental discoveries into clinically relevant applications.

A special focus will be placed on current efforts to establish a Comprehensive Cancer Centre framework in Slovakia through participation in European initiatives, including the CCI4EU programme and collaboration with the Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OECI). The OECI Deep Dive programme, conducted with the support of European experts, has provided valuable guidance for the development of integrated cancer infrastructures, fostering closer connections between research, education and patient care and aligning Slovak oncology with European standards and best practices.

ABSTRACTS OF LECTURES (in alphabetical order)

Finally, current challenges and future opportunities for Slovak oncology research will be discussed, including strengthening translational infrastructures, enhancing collaboration between academia and healthcare providers, integrating molecular and clinical data, supporting young investigators and increasing participation in European cancer research initiatives. The future success of cancer research in Slovakia will depend on the ability to create an integrated ecosystem that effectively connects discovery science, clinical research and innovation for the benefit of patients.

Keywords: cancer research, Slovakia, translational oncology, precision medicine, Comprehensive Cancer Centre, OECl, CCI4EU, Slovak Academy of Sciences, innovation, cancer policy.

ABSTRACTS OF LECTURES (in alphabetical order)



The ECHoS project, from idea to implementation. The role of NCMHs in the implementation of EU Mission on Cancer

Hugo Soares, PhD.

Science Manager at AICIB

– The Portuguese Agency for Clinical Research

and Biomedical Innovation & Co-coordinator, ECHoS Project

Cancer remains one of Europe's most urgent health challenges, with cases projected to exceed 3.24 million by 2040. Confronting this reality requires coordinated action that bridges research, policy, healthcare, and society. Europe's Beating Cancer Plan (2020) and the EU Mission on Cancer (2021) placed cancer at the core of the EC political agenda, creating a mission-oriented framework that promotes collaboration across sectors and governance levels. Within this landscape, National Cancer Mission Hubs (NCMHs) have emerged as key conveners of diverse stakeholders, bridging siloed sectors and translating strategic objectives into practical solutions. The ECHoS project is now entering phase II of implementation moving from the foundations (2023–2026) to consolidation, capacity-building, and long-term sustainability.

This presentation will explore how the ECHoS project translated an ambitious idea into reality and how it is helping National structures implementing EU Mission on Cancer and EBCP initiatives in the respective countries through knowledge creation, impact assessment, synergies, communication and by fostering multisectoral collaborative action. A key initiative is the implementation of more than 16 Policy Dialogues on cancer in multiple countries that have led to accelerate the development of actions and policies on cancer. This work, performed in collaboration with the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies by WHO will be explored in the presentation together with links to other EU initiatives and policies.

ABOUT THE ECHoS: Establishing Cancer Mission Hubs: beyond Networks and Synergies



„We aim to create real life impact in cancer care and research.“

The ECHoS project, funded by Horizon Europe under the EU Mission on Cancer, was established to support the implementation of the Cancer Mission across EU Member States and Associated Countries and to lay the foundations for the creation of a future European Network of National Cancer Mission Hubs. The project brings together partners from across Europe with the ambition to create a strong and cohesive network of national, regional, and local Cancer Mission Hubs aligned with the objectives of the **EU Mission on Cancer and Europe's Beating Cancer Plan**.

A central aim of ECHoS is to support countries in establishing and developing National Cancer Mission Hubs that can bring together key stakeholders involved in cancer control and care. It will engage with stakeholders across the entire cancer landscape, from individual citizens to European Institutions, as well as national authorities, regulators, industry, patient organisations, and academia. By connecting these different perspectives, National Cancer Mission Hubs can help strengthen collaboration, improve coordination of cancer-related activities, and create stronger links between research, innovation, healthcare, policy, and the needs of patients and society.

The ECHoS broad scope seeks to take cancer-policy dialogues beyond research and innovation and health systems, covering also other relevant areas in cancer control and support, such as employment, education, and socioeconomic aspects. To guarantee alignment and progress in the field of cancer, ECHoS will be guided by impacting subareas of Cancer Mission – namely prevention, early detection and treatment, quality of Life and survivorship – as well as equity, sustainability, and cross-cutting EU priorities such as social engagement and digital health.

All consortium partners have key roles in their respective countries: in cancer care, research, as well as research and health policies. These partners include citizens, industry, SMEs, academia, governance, hospitals, and infrastructures. Many are involved in community engagement activities and/or defining cancer-control strategies. Together, they form a strong and structured pool of knowledge and expertise.







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