

5th ESMO Asia Congress highlights Asia's increasing Cancer Burden

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The ESMO Asia Congress 2019 came to a close on 24th Nov 2019, after three days of thought-provoking lectures aimed at shaping the future of cancer care and keeping the regional oncological community up to date with the latest advancements. With one-half of global cancer cases being in Asia, the disease is a massive burden on public health systems and infrastructure in the region. Events such as the ESMO Asia Congress have a critical role to play in strengthening collaboration within the medical community, disease-specific knowledge and patient care.

With this year marking the fifth edition of the congress organised by the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO by its acronym), the event saw a record turnout of over 3,800 oncology professionals from more than 70 countries. At the event, 185 expert speakers from 36 countries around the world shed light on various critical aspects of cancer research, prevention and treatment and over a hundred medical abstracts focusing on the Asia-Pacific population were presented.

The event was opened by Dr Lam Pin Min, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Transport & Ministry of Health of Singapore, on the 22nd of November. In his opening address, Dr Lam highlighted the importance of specialised cancer care in Asia, noting that the battle against cancer is a continuous fight that requires a strategic and collaborative approach combining prevention and screening, treatment and research.

"I am heartened by the great turnout and active participation of all attendees at the ESMO Asia Congress 2019," said ESMO President Josep Tabernero. ESMO is also grateful to the 21 endorsing societies in the region, the 90 scientific committee members who put the Congress programme together. "ESMO remains committed to greater integration in patient care and improving their quality of life and we look forward to an even bigger and better ESMO Asia Congress in 2020."

Key Congress speakers included Dr André Ilbawi of the World Health Organization (WHO) who highlighted the importance of developing robust National Cancer Control Plans, bolstered by a disciplined implementation, good governance and comprehensive measurement. He also emphasised the need for policymakers to set evidence-based priorities, focus on early diagnoses and implement pricing models that enhance affordability.

The role of population-based cancer registries as the backbone of efforts to improve the quality of care in the region was also a key discussion area at the event. Dr Gouri Bhattacharya of ESMO's Asia-Pacific Public Policy Committee stressed the importance of quality registry data to assess the cancer burden in a given population, understand disease trends, evaluate the success of national cancer control plans, shape policies and estimate future healthcare needs.

Several experts also released their latest study findings for the first time during this Congress, with significant potential impact on the efficacy and accessibility of treatment. Highlights included a new study that reported that China-developed trastuzumab biosimilar HLX02 achieved similar response rates to reference trastuzumab in women with human epidermal

growth factor receptor 2-positive (HER2+) recurrent or previously untreated metastatic breast cancer. As many cancer drugs, including trastuzumab, are not affordable, the development of biosimilars is critical to ensuring the accessibility of cancer care not just in Asia, but around the world.

The 2019 ESMO Leaders Generation Programme for Asia was also held on the sidelines of the event. The four-day programme was targeted at helping oncologists up to the age of 45 years shape their careers and included sessions on leadership and communication training, clinical discussions and networking opportunities, on top of insights from key opinion leaders on the developments in the oncology world.

“The world of oncology is changing rapidly and young doctors face many pressures: from the unavailability of the right equipment and medicine to help their patients, to stress and burnout,” said LGP Asia programme leader, Dr Ravindran Kanesvaran. “Through the Leaders Generation Programme, ESMO is committed to helping young oncologists not only navigate their own careers with panache but actively participate in the broader discussions that will help the oncology community provide better care for all cancer patients.”

The ESMO Asia Congress 2019 is endorsed by 21 oncology associations in the Asia-Pacific region. The ESMO Asia Congress will return to Singapore for its sixth edition from 20th – 22nd November 2020.