



## Our partnership with patients

→ Heinz Ludwig ■ GUEST EDITOR

**R**eceiving a cancer diagnosis changes everything in your life. It brings fear and uncertainty, it impacts on your body and soul, it affects your partner, family and friends, it has financial implications, it can even change your spiritual outlook. Making considered and informed decisions at a time like this is terribly hard. It's a bit like emigrating to a new country – you don't understand the language, you don't know how things are done, you feel lost and vulnerable, but you have to find a way to settle in and build a new life.

Cancer patients need doctors who can help them in their efforts to come to terms with their diagnosis, and equip them to take informed decisions on treatment options. But doctors cannot do this without developing their own understanding of what patients are going through and how best to respond to needs and wishes that are likely to vary from patient to patient. It is a question of working in partnership.

The European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) sees strengthening the patient-physician partnership as a priority. Two years ago, in Nice, we became the first European oncology body to organise a seminar for patients and their families at our annual meeting. In 2003, the second patients' seminar was organised, with

patients helping to set the agenda and taking their place on the platform.

In recognition of the growing level of organisation among patients, this year's seminar, scheduled for October 30-31 at the ESMO conference in Vienna, has been organised in collaboration with a number of patient groups, including the European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC). Questions of how to strengthen patients' physical, mental and spiritual energy to help them deal with the problems they face will be among the topics up for discussion.

Building an understanding of patients' needs plays a vital role in improving the care we can offer. But seminars like these are also important in the wider battle to improve cancer care. By bringing together patients from all over Europe, they assist the ECPC and other patient groups who are trying to create networks of patient advocates to campaign for improved care and raise awareness of the needs of cancer patients – in their home lives, working lives and social lives. Europe has ten million people directly affected by cancer, and more than ten times that number affected indirectly. Together, we surely represent a potent force for change.

I hope to see you in Vienna.

*Heinz Ludwig is a past President of ESMO and Chairman of the ESMO Foundation*