

The European Beating Cancer Plan states: High-quality cancer care depends on a high-quality workforce.

A number of studies clearly show that the EU is suffering from a shortage of nursing staff. We see up to 40% of nurses leave in the first years of the job. Now, during the Covid-19 pandemic, up to 66% of nurses say the pandemic has made them consider leaving the nursing profession. These are very worrying numbers!

Act now. This isn't about some far away future of the healthcare workforce – change is already happening, and it is accelerating.

Healthcare professionals are leaving the profession, and replacing them won't be easy – and this will create disruptions in cancer care delivery and will negatively affect safety and overall outcomes for patients with cancers.

Give cancer nurses an equal opportunity to evolve their skills across Europe.

A big part of preparing the cancer nursing workforce of the future is educating and training cancer nurses across the European continent.

This investment makes good sense: Providing cancer nurses with equal access to educational, training and career opportunities, and the associated continued training to evolve in their jobs can give healthcare across Europe a recruiting, retention and performance boost, which will help ensure workforce sustainability in the long term.

Let go of yesterday's approaches to learning

Developing an EU cancer nursing workforce, so that cancer nurses can stay relevant in the workforce of the future, will require a rethink about how we educate and train them. We need to take the opportunity to implement and strengthen inter-professional education and training. We work together, so why not train together?

Watch for work-related stress in healthcare. Look at the people behind the jobs.

We can't protect all jobs which are made redundant by change and innovation in cancer care – but policy makers do have a responsibility to their healthcare workforce. We can protect healthcare professionals by nurturing recognition, access to lifelong learning opportunities, supporting movability of the cancer care workforce across Europe and providing re-skilling opportunities.

We also need to support the young cancer care workforce so that they are stimulated, and develop passion to strengthen the future high-quality cancer care workforce.

This way, we can create a high quality healthcare workforce, by all working together.

EONS President Johan de Munter, 17 November 2021, European Cancer Summit.