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Belarus to Strengthen Cancer Services, Building on IAEA-IARC-WHO ImPACT Review



Josep Martin (centre), diagnostic imaging and nuclear medicine expert, Meaghan Jennison (right), nuclear security expert, discuss medical physics practices and procedures at the N N Aleksandrov National Cancer Centre in Minsk. (Photo: IAEA/F El Haffar)

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— Oleg Sukonko, Director,
NN Aleksandrov National Cancer Centre

Belarus is looking to bolster its cancer care services through enhanced coordination at the national level and improved cancer screening programmes, officials said following a recent IAEA-led review of the country’s cancer services.

“As life expectancy is rising, we have to be prepared as a country for an increase in cancer cases,” said Dmitry Pinevich, First Deputy Minister of Health. Last month, the IAEA-IARC-WHO conducted an “imPACT review” mission to Belarus to evaluate the country’s cancer control

capacities, in order to support future planning and expansion of cancer services. This mission forms one of a number of services provided by the IAEA to assist a country plan and implement efforts to tackle its cancer burden.

The imPACT review team comprised of international cancer experts nominated by the IAEA, the World Health Organisation’s Regional Office for Europe (WHO-EURO) and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), and funded by the IAEA. The experts assessed all components of cancer control including registry, prevention and early detection, diagnosis, treatment and palliative care. The role of civil society was also considered. The evaluation covered a broad range of public and private, urban and rural health care and civil society institutions in Minsk, in the northern city of Vilejka and in Grodno in the western part of the country.

The IAEA-led team found high standards in the delivery of cancer services. At the same time, despite having well-run and well-equipped facilities, cancer remains the second leading cause of death in the country after cardiovascular diseases, which

can be partially attributed to the comparatively high consumption of tobacco and alcohol.

The experts made a number of recommendations, including further strengthening the effectiveness of current cancer screening programmes and improving public awareness of cancer, which coincides with a €1 million grant for breast cancer screening recently awarded by the EU. Improving the coordination and communication between different areas of cancer control were also highlighted as a priority.

Belarussian officials indicated that they were committed to implement the recommendations. “We need greater collaboration between our cancer control facilities and programmes to increase the effectiveness of the services,” said Oleg Sukonko, Director of the NN Aleksandrov National Cancer Centre.

While Belarus provides high quality diagnostic and treatment services with committed medical staff, more needs to be done, said Egor Zaitsev, the Head of WHO Country Office in the country. “This disease is a persistent issue with lung and breast cancers topping the list of most common types, with the highest rates of cancer deaths. It is very important for Belarus to strengthen tobacco and alcohol control,” he added.

The IAEA Programme of Action for Cancer Therapy (PACT) offers a variety of services including capacity building and training for cancer control specialists, and mobilizes resources to support the expansion of cancer services in IAEA Member States.

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