

BM Gröhe Statement
Side-event on
Childhood cancer: the importance of universal access to
treatment, care and support

Assistant Director General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased that in the margins of the World Health Assembly, we have the great opportunity to put a special focus on **pediatric** cancers.

Cancer is a complex and heterogenous disease. It is fraught with anxieties for those affected, and the challenges for the provision of treatment and care are enormous.

Cancer in children and young adults is an unspeakable emotional burden for the entire family. Almost without exception, cancers in this age group are rare diseases. The proportion of pediatric cancers is less than 1% of all cancer cases. Yet, it is one of the leading causes of death for children.

In Germany there are about 2000 new cancer cases in children and adolescents each year.

Thankfully the diagnosis of cancer is no longer the death sentence it once was, also in Germany. Survival has increased significantly over the last decades. In Germany the overall survival rate of children and young adults with cancer is now over 80%. For some the five year survival rate is over 90%.

Although current treatment of childhood malignancies results in high overall cure rates, **relapse from high risk disease remains a tremendous clinical** problem. We try to tackle this by increased research. It is addressed for example with the INFORM* registry. The

concept of the INFORM registry is to biologically characterize tumor samples for all pediatric patients with relapsed. No therapy recommendation will be given within this registry study, but the molecular data will be made available to the treating physician. We hope to be able to improve medical care further.

The key to the success in oncological pediatric practice has been the consistent improvement of treatment standards including long term follow-up. Virtually every child and young adult in Germany with cancer now participates in standardised therapeutic trials. These multi-centre studies are based on up-to-date scientific clinical evidence that is being adjusted continuously.

But this does not mean we can save every child. And those children and their families need the most support. **We need more communication between different sectors of care.** And we also see the need to establish a well-functioning hospice and palliative care. My wish is that severely ill children and their families have the certainty that they are accompanied and supported in those most difficult situations. Therefore we are planning to increase the financial situation of hospices and increase cooperation with a new law.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Pediatric oncology has to provide highly specialised care to save lives. It is a specialty that benefits greatly from collaboration, at a national and international level. Therefore, Germany very much supports initiatives to intensify our efforts in working together.

Civil society such as SIOP (International Society of Paediatric Oncology) plays a key role in supporting collaborative opportunities and translating scientific discovery to improve the outcomes for children with cancer.

Today's side-event clearly demonstrates that childhood diseases, such as childhood cancer should not be neglected within the broader NCD agenda, that – up to now – has primarily focussed on adults.

Thank you for your attention.