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Ljubljana, December 11, 2024

The National Council of the Republic of Slovenia, at its 23rd session on December 11, 2024, based on the second indent of the first paragraph of Article 97 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (Official Gazette of the RS, No. 33/91-I, 42/97, 66/00, 24/03, 69/04, 68/06, 47/13, 75/16, and 92/21), adopted the following:

RESOLUTION

The National Council has reviewed the conclusions of the Consultation on the Prostate Cancer Screening Program – Where Are We and What's Next? and, pursuant to the first and second paragraphs of Article 97 of the Rules of Procedure of the National Council, calls upon the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, particularly the Ministry of Health, to examine the conclusions and respond within 30 days.

Conclusions of the Consultation:

The Commission for Social Welfare, Labour, Health, and Disability of the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia, in collaboration with the Association of Urological Patients of Slovenia and the Oncology Institute of Ljubljana, organized a consultation in the National Council hall on November 4, 2024, titled *Prostate Cancer Screening Program – Where Are We and What's Next?*

This consultation provided an in-depth overview of the activities stimulated by the first consultation on the prostate cancer screening program, held on November 10, 2022, in the National Council of the Republic of Slovenia, titled *Early Detection of Prostate Cancer Through a Screening Program*, jointly organized by the National Council's Commission for Social Welfare, Labour, Health, and Disability and the Association of Urological Patients of Slovenia.

The aim of the recent consultation was to present progress in the implementation of the prostate cancer screening program in Slovenia and to identify additional measures and resources necessary for the prompt initiation of this program, including the definition of at least a tentative timeline for its implementation.

The consultation also provided an opportunity to familiarize attendees with the pilot project for introducing a prostate cancer screening program in Slovenia, already underway under the auspices of the Oncology Institute of Ljubljana, supported by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia, the Ministry of Health, and the National Institute of Public Health, and in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, particularly the Association of Urological Patients of Slovenia.

One of the key objectives of the consultation was to inform professionals and the public about research findings, international experiences, and best practices, as well as to raise awareness among the broader public and prostate cancer patients, and those with other prostate conditions, about the importance of prevention in reducing the incidence of prostate cancer.

The consultation, moderated by National Councillor Danijel Kastelic, Chair of the Commission for Social Welfare, Labour, Health, and Disability, and Igor Antauer, President of the Association of Urological Patients of Slovenia, comprised two thematic segments of expert presentations. The opening addresses were delivered by Marko Lotrič, President of the National Council; Igor Antauer, President of the Association of Urological Patients of Slovenia; Zlata Štiblar Kisić, Director of the Oncology Institute of Ljubljana; and Vesna Marinko, Director General of the Directorate of Public Health at the Ministry of Health. A video address by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tit Albreht, Head of the Health Protection Centre at the National Institute of Public Health, was also planned but could not be shown due to technical issues. The video was subsequently shared with participants via email.

Key Takeaways:

Progress Made:

Prostate cancer is a significant public health challenge, imposing a substantial burden on men, their families, the healthcare system, and society as a whole. Despite advancements in diagnostics, the number of diagnosed prostate cancer cases continues to rise, along with mortality rates, highlighting the need for a comprehensive response.

Statistics reveal that prostate cancer is the most common cancer among men in most developed countries, including Europe. In Slovenia, during the 2016–2020 period, prostate cancer accounted for 19.6% of all cancers. The country's incidence rate exceeds the European average, placing Slovenia among the most affected regions globally, comparable to Baltic and Scandinavian countries.

From 2016 to 2020, Slovenia recorded 1,648 new prostate cancer cases annually and over 400 deaths per year, despite opportunistic screening. These trends underline the urgent need for an organized screening program to address this growing challenge effectively.

Research and international experiences emphasize the need for a tailored and systematic approach to screening, employing PSA (Prostate-Specific Antigen) testing complemented by advanced diagnostic methods, such as MRI, to minimize unnecessary procedures and maximize clinical benefits.

Recommendations for Action:

- Transition from opportunistic to organized screening to ensure systematic early detection and improve survival rates.

- Implement a pilot study involving approximately 10,000 men aged 50–69 to refine the program’s methodology and assess feasibility.
 - Enhance public awareness and professional engagement through targeted education campaigns, leveraging non-governmental organizations to bridge communication gaps.
 - Secure sustainable funding, adequate staffing, and infrastructure, including increased access to MRI diagnostics.
 - Establish legal frameworks and a central screening registry to facilitate effective program implementation and monitoring.
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Marko Lotrič President

Detailed Recommendations and International Insights:

Understanding the Scale of the Problem: Prostate cancer’s prevalence among men is significant, with projections suggesting a doubling of cases in the European Union by 2040. Currently, Slovenia’s prostate cancer incidence exceeds the European average. Death rates are also high, placing Slovenia among the countries with the most substantial prostate cancer burdens. This highlights the pressing need for a systematic approach to early detection and treatment.

Pilot Projects and International Collaborations: The Oncology Institute of Ljubljana, in partnership with national and international organizations, is spearheading a pilot project to evaluate the feasibility of a population-based screening program. Insights from similar initiatives in other EU countries, such as PRAISE-U and Joint Action EUCANSCREEN, emphasize the benefits of a tailored screening algorithm integrating PSA testing and advanced imaging techniques like MRI. Pilot studies also underscore the need for robust data management, including central registries and evaluation metrics, to ensure screening programs’ effectiveness and efficiency.

Public Awareness and Education: There is a critical need to enhance awareness among men regarding prostate health and the benefits of organized screening programs. Public information campaigns, complemented by educational materials developed in collaboration with patient advocacy groups, can significantly improve participation rates and reduce stigma associated with prostate cancer. Effective communication strategies are essential, particularly for addressing concerns about overdiagnosis and potential treatment side effects.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice:

1. **Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** Establish clear legislative support for the introduction and sustainability of organized prostate cancer screening programs.
2. **Resource Allocation:** Ensure adequate funding and resources for staff training, diagnostic equipment (e.g., MRI), and infrastructure.

3. **Integration of Innovative Technologies:** Incorporate artificial intelligence and genetic markers to refine risk stratification and reduce unnecessary interventions.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Foster collaboration among healthcare providers, policymakers, patient organizations, and the public to align goals and expectations for the screening program.

Future Steps:

To ensure a comprehensive healthcare approach for men and reduce the burden of prostate cancer on society:

- Guarantee evidence-based treatments for patients already diagnosed with prostate cancer, including active monitoring and management to maintain optimal quality of life.
- Strengthen preventive activities tailored to prostate cancer, focusing on timely detection and management through an organized population-based screening program.
- Develop promotional campaigns beyond annual awareness events like "Movember," ensuring sustained public education and engagement throughout the year.
- Collaborate with stakeholders, including patient associations, to design and implement educational programs for younger generations about reproductive health, prostate health, and the potential impact of prostate cancer.

This document outlines a clear pathway for transitioning from opportunistic screening practices to a structured, evidence-based approach, ensuring better outcomes for patients and a sustainable healthcare framework for the future.