

# UICC-ARO Convenes International Session at 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Japanese Cancer Association

**Meeting held in the city of Yokohama and online addresses the timely and critical issue of innovation for achieving UHC for cancer in Asia**



(October 2, 2021) UICC-Asia Regional Office (UICC-ARO) convened a international session at the 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Japanese Cancer Association. Due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 the meeting was held in a hybrid format, with international participants participating at the venue in Yokohama and online, including session Co-Chair and UICC President-elect, Prof. Jeff Dunn.

With the support and collaboration of UICC, UICC-ARO was among the first to engage in research into UHC for cancer. Today the concept of equitable medical care that leaves no-one behind has never been more important. Looking ahead to the theme of the UICC Leaders' Summit of "Driving innovation to advance cancer control equitably," and in advance of a further international UICC-Japan session scheduled to address similar issues in the forum of the Annual Meeting of the Japan Society of Clinical Oncology at the end of October, this session sought to leverage the combined expertise of UICC and bring together international stakeholders to discuss the sources of innovation that are of critical importance if we are to achieve UHC in the Asian region, with its rich socioeconomic diversity. Joining Prof. Dunn as session Co-Chairs were Dr. Tetsuo Noda (Executive Chair, UICC-Japan) and Dr. Kazuo Tajima (Mie University).

Opening the session, Dr. Tajima recalled a comment made by Dr. Noda that "In order to raise the level of cancer treatment in Asia, we must not only concentrate on the medical characteristics of the disease, but also adopt a more macro perspective that takes into account the social determinants of cancer in Asia, including social structures, culture and economy." He noted that innovation is key to achieving UHC in Asia.

In his opening presentation, Prof. Dunn discussed the role of civil society organizations, emphasizing that all stakeholders have a role to play and that together, all of our actions matter. Given the reality that at least half of the world's population still do not have access to essential health services, civil society has an important role to play in advocating for national UHC plans. Prof. Dunn underlined that the input of civil society groups, including patients, clinicians and community groups, should be a core component of the development of UHC policy goals, benefit packages, and monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure that services effectively respond to patient needs. In this respect it is important to establish multi-stakeholder mechanisms to engage different stakeholders to gather input and ensure the transparency of the UHC development process.

Dr. Mary Gospodarowicz (University of Toronto) spoke on the topic of cancer control, opportunities for radiotherapy and the importance of UHC, noting that global cancer control is faced with a growing cancer burden and complexity and innovation is urgently needed to secure equitable access and benefits from care for everyone. She highlighted that although medical and technical advances mean that cancer outcomes in cancer are improving, the ever-increasing cancer burden and complexity call for innovation, because current practice will not be sufficient to achieve equitable cancer care for all. One outcome of the pandemic has been that digital technologies have been actively utilized and could usefully be applied in response to cancer in the future. Dr. Gospodarowicz noted that radiotherapy actually falls short in many UHC systems and it is imperative to invest in health systems to achieve UHC.

Dr. Kunihiro Ishitani (Higashi Sapporo Hospital) spoke on the topic of UHC and palliative care, noting health innovation is essential to achieving UHC and that it is impossible to make progress on UHC by relying just on the tools and technologies of yesterday. Leveraging the expertise of scientists and researchers in government and the private sector, it is imperative to find new ways to solve health challenges. Similarly to Dr. Gospodarowicz, he noted that digital solutions have been a vital part of UHC and they will also be incorporated into palliative care going forward.

Dr. Takahiro Tabuchi (Osaka International Cancer Institute) spoke about the ongoing importance of tobacco control measures, including price increases, smoke-free policies and anti-tobacco media campaigns, particularly in the Asian region, where measures continue to lag behind other regions.

Dr. Masaru Iwasaki (University of Yamanashi) spoke about the role for UICC-Japan in new drug development and UHC in Asia, in collaboration with the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development (AMED) and its various projects and programs. He called on UICC-Japan to work to: 1) effectively connect stakeholders in communities, industry, academia and government, including investigation of local needs in each country, 2) share international knowledge on cancer treatment and establish a UHC-enabling system, and investigate the possibilities for the creation of an Asian Provision Center for Cancer UHC, connecting all stakeholders, and 3) develop an environment that allows for discussion of all development stages of UHC in the community.

The issues raised at this session are all critical for the realization of UHC for cancer in the post-COVID world. In particular, innovation as a driver for equitable cancer control is a topic that links through to the theme of "Equity" for World Cancer Day 2022, and it is also the main theme for Third Public-Private Dialogue Forum that is scheduled to be convened by UICC-ARO in February 2022.