



➔ FACTSHEET 10

The importance of partnerships



When patient groups, health care professionals, and other organisations work together on a common goal they can often achieve objectives which would not be possible for organisations working on their own. This also ensures that everyone interested in supporting women with gynaecological cancers are 'on the same team'.

Partnerships with other organisations are invaluable when:

- The problems you face are complex and long-term.
- You need to avoid duplicating efforts with other agencies, and make sure that everyone's investment of time and energy are being optimally employed

Networking is often the start of this process and is an important skill to learn as you develop your gynaecological cancer support and advocacy group. Getting to know people in other organisations will help you:

- Increase your knowledge in a variety of areas.
- Learn examples of good (and bad!) practice.
- Learn a similar 'language' or way of communicating about issues that are understandable to all. This prevents overuse of jargon which can be a real barrier to progress.
- Widen your network of people and organisations who may have answers for the challenges you face.
- Create links which may form the basis of future formal partnerships and cooperative working.

Linking with other patient groups

It is really important to have open and clear communication with other patient groups that share some, or all, of your group's objectives. Competition can be an unhelpful distraction and waste of resources, whereas partnership can yield benefits for both parties. You might not be working with all of the groups, but it is important to work with the ones who share the same value and understand the importance of "uniting".

You may need to improve connections with regional, national or international gynaecological cancer support and advocacy groups. Also there may be a need to develop awareness of the more general patient groups that deal with all cancers or umbrella groups such as the European Patients Forum (<http://www.eu-patient.eu/>) that connect a large number of patient groups. It is worth spending time to understand the different values that may underpin different patient groups

This will help you to assess the feasibility of partnering with them in a more formal way. Ask yourselves:

- Do they share our core values?
- How do they communicate and portray themselves to the general public?
- What is their attitude to receiving funding from different pharmaceutical companies?
- Do they have sound financial management?
- How do they represent patients and carers?
- Can they recruit and support enough skilled workers?

Linking with health care professionals

Building strong partnerships with key healthcare professionals is vital. Obviously, healthcare professionals will have a very different perspective than patients and be focused on the patient's disease and need for effective treatment and care. They will be an invaluable partner in helping patients to understand new therapies and the latest research and you also can learn from them!

However, it is worth remembering that your group's perspective is also vital for healthcare professionals. They need to know how a disease and treatments are experienced by patients to ensure that patientcentred approach is developed.

Your Group is a "Lengthen arm" of the experts and patients. A kind of link consequently everybody's way becomes easier. This is an important message for the expert!

How to choose the best partnership for your group

Partnerships can be for specific projects or for more long-term co-operation. As always, you need to spend time in assessing your organisation's needs and identify where there are gaps in your knowledge or practice that could be supported by closer work with other organisations. The Value+ Toolkit, designed by the European Patients' Forum, provides a valuable approach to assessing potential partnerships with other organisations across Europe and will give you some ideas in getting the most from partnerships (<http://www.eu-patient.eu/>).

To start with, it is useful to draw up some criteria about the type of partner you require and develop a proposal to present to them. You may also already have links with other organisations or individuals that you can develop into stronger partnerships.

The Community Tool Box website (<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/creating-and-maintaining-partnerships>) provides a useful toolkit to aid creation and maintenance of partnerships among different organisations to address a common goal. The site describes a number of key steps to take in choosing and starting a partnership which include:

- Understanding the organisations that have come together for common purpose
- Assembling the group's membership
- Outlining vision and mission
- Stating objectives and goals
- Describing barriers to success
- Identifying financial resources
- Sharing responsibilities
- Describing potential structure
- Maintaining momentum
- Revisiting the plan
- Considering alternatives

Formalising partnerships

Cooperation with other patient organisations can take place across a wide variety of activities before formal partnerships are considered. These can include:

- Organising and delivering joint training so expertise can be shared
- Linking websites so users can easily access a range of information
- Lobbying policy makers together

When forming a formal partnership, potential partners need to identify the opportunities and risks that could come from joining with the other organisations. Do the potential partners' aims and values fit with each other? Do they have sound financial management? Can they recruit and support enough skilled workers?

There are a range of different partnerships that could support the work of your organisation. The type of partnership you choose depends upon many factors including the different groups' goals, the level of commitment from the groups, and how any barriers can be overcome. Types of formal partnership include:

NETWORKS

to share information and ideas. These can be groupings such as the European Patient's Forum or ENGAGE.

TASK FORCES

to coordinate an intense, short-term effort that requires input from many different groups. Partners will usually agree to complete a specific and well-defined task within a specified period of time.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES

to provide valuable input from a variety of key professionals to improve the quality of services that your organisation can provide. Patient support groups may have a scientific advisory committee with doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals to give perspective on a range of clinical topics and keep the organisation up to speed with new developments.

COALITIONS

to provide a forum for organisations who may normally compete and duplicate efforts in the area of gynaecological cancer to work together. Joint planning and action will improve services to patients and potentially reduce costs to all the participating organisations.

A key part of developing a partnership is to explore a shared vision and objectives. As always, objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed).



Partnership Evaluation

Any partnership should be evaluated regularly. This can be on a formal basis reviewed annually or more regularly, or can be an informal ongoing process. Asking a number of questions regularly about the partnership can be useful:

- Does the partnership still meet our objectives?
- Are new members needed?
- Do we need to change our structure?

A simple way to evaluate meetings run jointly with other organisations is to use evaluation forms which include open-ended questions. Any feedback should be reviewed and acted on as necessary.



Further information

Much useful information on developing partnerships can be found online. A few selected resources are highlighted below:

The Value+ Toolkit

A valuable approach designed by the European Patients Forum (<http://www.eu-patient.eu/>) which supports the exchange of information and experiences of good practice among patient organisations across Europe (<http://www.eu-patient.eu/globalassets/projects/valueplus/value-toolkit.pdf>)

Forging Partnerships Toolkit

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention produced a toolkit on how to strengthen partnerships to eliminate tuberculosis. Some of strategies and methods used are transferable to different conditions such as gynaecological cancers (<http://www.cdc.gov/tb/publications/guidestoolkits/forgel>)

Making Community Partnerships Work: a Toolkit

The US GENE Project and March of Dimes Foundation aim to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. This document includes some material that will benefit develop partnerships in the world of gynaecological cancer support. (<http://www.aapcho.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Giach-Ilo-MakingCommunityPartnershipsWorkToolkit.pdf>)

The CDC 'Inside Knowledge

Get the facts about Gynecologic Cancer' Campaign'. This US campaign to educate women and healthcare providers about the five main gynaecological cancers. It required careful partnership with a number of different organisations across the US and is a useful case study of partnership. (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4480627/>)

Strengthening

It is need to understand that nothing is able to start with success. Having the partnership with experts is not easy at the first time. Sometime it needs time to let your work seen and have the trust from the experts especially from the doctors. It is understandable, as one of the trademark of the patient groups is the credibility. If you have no expert partnership before, start with one or two of the doctors and build your expert partnership step by step.



Contact information of ENGAGE:

Web: <http://engage.esgo.org/>

Email: engage@esgo.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/155472521534076/about/>

