DIGESTIVE CANCERS: A CHALLENGE FOR HEALTHY LIFESTYLE, SCREENING PROGRAMMES AND ORGANISATION OF CANCER CARE

In the Czech Republic, about 3,500 patients die from colorectal cancer each year. However, many of these deaths are unnecessary because a large proportion of these fatal cancers can be prevented by a healthier lifestyle or by undergoing a screening test, which is able to reveal the disease at an early stage. At the end of September, the capital of Prague hosts an international conference dedicated to prevention and treatment of colorectal cancer and other digestive cancers – European Digestive Cancer Days 2017 (EDCD, http://www.cancer-days.eu/). This conference was preceded by a national conference PreVOn – Programmes of prevention, screening and early diagnosis of serious diseases in the light of current evidence and practical experience (http://prevon.uzis.cz), the aim of which, among others, was to introduce activities of the newly established Czech National Coordination Centre for Prevention of Serious Diseases.

The international conference EDCD 2017 is picking up the threads of the annual European Colorectal Cancer Days conference, which took place in Brno in years 2012–2015 (www.crcprevention.eu), and is extending its focus. Support and promotion for colorectal cancer screening were among important objectives of those conferences in Brno; this screening must be performed according to international recommendations and standards, which are important prerequisites for a high-quality screening programme with a life-saving potential.

The conference EDCD 2017 is taking place under the auspices of several leading personalities: Vytenis Andriukaitis, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety; Pavel Poc, Member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety; Miroslav Ludvík, Minister of Health of the Czech Republic; Rostislav Vyzula, Chairman of the Committee on Health of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic; Tomáš Zima, Rector of the Charles University; Alena Šteflová, Head of WHO Country Office in the Czech Republic; and Štěpán Svačina, President of the Czech Medical Association of J. E. Purkyne; the conference is also taking place under the auspices of the Czech Society of Gastroenterology and the Czech Society for Oncology.

Each year in the Czech Republic, almost 86,000 persons are diagnosed with cancer and about 27,000 persons die from cancer; at present, there are almost 542,000 persons with a history of cancer in the Czech population. Each year, approximately 8,000 persons are diagnosed with colorectal cancer and about 3,500 persons die from this disease. The project of personalised invitations of Czech citizens to cancer screening programmes has been under way since 1 January 2014, in cooperation between the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic and health insurance companies. Its main objective is to increase low participation rates in cancer screening programmes; this applies particularly to the colorectal cancer screening programme, the participation rate of which was only 26% of all men and women aged over 50 years (the target population of this programme) before the introduction of personalised invitations. In the period from January 2014 to December 2016, over 3.7 million invitation letters to screening examination aimed at an early detection of colorectal cancer were sent out; this has led to a significant increase in colorectal cancer screening coverage in the period 2014–2015, exceeding 32% of the target population.
Despite the undeniable success, this prevention programme still misses many Czech citizens who are at risk of colorectal cancer. Healthcare professionals, policymakers and media representatives therefore have a common task: to pay enough attention to this issue, which will ultimately lead to a further decrease in the number of deaths from colorectal cancer each year.