Broad action plan proposed to give more cancer patients in Belgium access to innovative radioligand therapy

Implementation of an 'RLT Action Plan' strengthens Belgium's position as a 'pharma valley'

Brussels, June 19, 2024 – Belgium has the potential to become a global hub for radioligand therapy (RLT), thanks to our country's years of expertise in nuclear medicine. RLT is a pioneering therapy for people with advanced-stage cancer and could become a major new pillar in the fight against the disease. The 'RLT Action Plan' to make our healthcare system RLT-future-proof was presented today. Developed in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders, the action plan provides recommendations to policymakers. Its roll-out is not only good news for patients in Belgium, who will subsequently have faster access to a new, lifesaving, treatment, but it also ensures both investments and job creation in this promising field.

Radioligand therapy (RLT) is an innovative treatment that uses nuclear medicine to treat different types of cancer in a targeted manner. It combines a molecule that recognises the cancer cells (the ligand) with a radioisotope, which aims to damage or destroy the cancer cells while limiting the impact on nearby healthy cells.[1,2]

Belgium is a long-standing frontrunner in the field of RLT, with a unique ecosystem

Belgium already has years of experience in both nuclear medicine and radioligand therapy. Our country has a unique ecosystem with leading nuclear experts, research facilities, research reactors, pharmaceutical companies, production facilities, specialised doctors, and hospitals. In total, the Belgian nuclear medicine sector has more than 5,000 dedicated professionals, including 350 specialists.[3]

With this expertise, Belgium can play the same pioneering role in the implementation of current and future radioligand therapies, becoming a global RLT hub and offering more patients in Belgium access to the pioneering treatment.

> *"Innovative techniques that can treat cancers better and with an evidence-based approach should be explored and supported, so that everyone can access this innovative care. Cooperation between everyone involved should be nurtured and given every opportunity to thrive,"* says **Jan Bertels, cabinet chief for the outgoing Minister of Social Affairs and Public Health, Frank Vandenbroucke.**

RLT-based innovation offers social and economic benefits

In our country, around 70,000 people receive a cancer diagnosis every year.[4] RLT can bring newfound hope to many of these people. Local investments in RLT can make the innovative treatment available to patients faster by, for example, access to clinical trials, provided the healthcare system around it is well organised. Today, RLT is already used to treat neuroendocrine tumours and metastatic prostate cancer. Currently, around 200 RLT clinical trials are ongoing worldwide to treat other cancers.[5] Some of these trials are in the final clinical phase.[6] Using RLT for other cancers could help even more patients.

“It is necessary to rapidly strengthen the capacity of nuclear medicine services to cope with the expected increase in the number of treatments. Through research, the possibilities for use will quickly expand to other cancers, thereby proportionally increasing the pressure on treatment centers. This is why the RLT Action Plan is absolutely necessary. Patients have the right to benefit from the advantages of this new treatment in our country,” says **Erik Briers, patient and vice-president of Europa Uomo, the European umbrella organization for prostate cancer.**

In addition to benefits for patients, a Belgian 'RLT Action Plan' also offers economic benefits. It provides valuable investments in research centres and the roll-out of R&D initiatives, as well as direct and indirect job creation, strengthening the entire local ecosystem.

Kicking off the implementation of Belgium's broad-based 'RLT Action Plan'

In order to perpetuate Belgium's pioneering role in RLT and future-proof our healthcare system, a broad 'RLT Action Plan' was drawn up by working with all stakeholders involved, including healthcare professionals, hospitals, research institutes, universities, patient associations and the public services (NIHDI, FAMHP and FANC).[7] The plan was drawn up in complete independence, led by the consultancy firm Inovigate, and made possible by innovative pharmaceutical company Novartis.

“Collaboration across the entire Belgian RLT ecosystem is crucial to fully access our potential and thus offer patients new perspectives,” says **Federico Mambretti, Country President Novartis Belgium & Luxembourg.** *“We are all links in the same chain, and face common challenges. By identifying these challenges together, and then addressing them, we can improve quality of life for people with cancer and extend their lifespan.”*

The 'RLT Action Plan' was presented today, in the presence of its contributors, and concrete implementation for the coming year was commenced.

“The demand for radioligand therapies is growing rapidly, and production and hospitals must be able to keep up with it. Belgium has unique assets available to roll out these cancer treatments broadly, and to give them a future, for the benefit of the patient, but we need to exploit these assets in a timely manner,” says **Koen Hasaers, Director of Nuclear Medical Applications at the Belgian Nuclear Research Centre, SCK CEN.** *“We are already taking concrete steps by increasing production capacity and stimulating pre-clinical research. Central to these efforts, however, is the collective fight against cancer. We therefore actively support sector initiatives such as this 'RLT Action Plan'.”*

References:

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(2) Duan H, Iagaru A, Aparici CM. Radiotheranostics - Precision Medicine in Nuclear Medicine and Molecular Imaging. Nanotheranostics. 2022;6(1):103-117. doi:10.7150/ntno.64141
(3) ‘A radioligand therapy plan for Belgium’ (June 2024), p.9
(4) ‘A radioligand therapy plan for Belgium’ (June 2024), p.6
(5) ‘A radioligand therapy plan for Belgium’ (June 2024), p.8
(6) For a complete overview: ‘A radioligand therapy plan for Belgium’ (June 2024), p.8, Figure 3
(7) For the full list: ‘A radioligand therapy plan for Belgium’ (June 2024), p.2