

HORG

Hellenic Oncology Research Group

Country: Greece

City: Athens

BIG Voting Representative: Dr Dimitris Mavroudis

Website: www.horg.gr (in Greek only; English version under construction)



HORG is a not-for-profit organisation started in 2000, but officially founded in 2002, that consists of 85 oncologists and cancer investigators working in 36 public or private oncology departments or units located all over Greece and Cyprus. Specifically, HORG conducts clinical and laboratory-based research on patients with malignant neoplasms, and it aims in particular to promote clinical and applied research while improving the therapeutic approaches and systems for patient care and support. Moreover HORG is actively involved in fostering education in clinical oncology, on the one hand by offering scholarships to undergraduate students and to young medical oncologists who wish to conduct cancer research, and on the other hand by organising national and international conventions and symposia.

HORG's central office is located in Athens and it coordinates all the research group's activities. During the last 5 years the group has been conducting more than 35 clinical trials on a national basis. HORG's scientific interest is on all types of solid tumours. However, it gives specific focus to some tumours such as breast, NSCLC and SCLC, colorectal, sarcomas/melanomas, CNS, gastric, and genitourinary. Most of HORG's funding comes from research grants from the pharmaceutical industry and other donations. However, all clinical trials are exclusively designed, conducted, monitored and analyzed by HORG's academic investigators or research associates.

INTERVIEW WITH DR MAVROUDIS

BIG: Why did HORG decide to join the BIG network? What does HORG expect from this affiliation?

Dr Mavroudis: Over the years, HORG has grown and its investigators have gained significant experience in the conduct of clinical trials. At present we feel that we are ready to join an international research network such as BIG in order to participate and contribute our efforts to well-designed clinical trials aimed at changing the practice of oncology. These trials require such a large number of patients that no single research group, certainly not ours, is able to enroll within a reasonable time period.

The HORG investigators have high expectations from this affiliation with BIG. They expect to participate in state-of-the-art clinical trials that offer patients with breast cancer perhaps a better treatment for their disease. They also expect to collaborate with breast cancer experts and opinion leaders from around the world and exchange ideas and plans. With our efforts and productivity we would like to gain reputation and respect within the breast cancer scientific community. Moreover, since translational research

is one of our primary aims, we could contribute biological material from our patients to tissue banks or specialized laboratories for novel investigations. We also expect to gain access to new technologies that open new horizons in breast cancer research.

In which clinical studies or research programs is HORG currently involved?

Between 2000 and 2008, HORG investigators have authored 67 publications, more than 10 of which are related to breast cancer. Most of these publications are results of phase I, II and III clinical trials and have been published in well-respected peer-reviewed journals such as *JCO*, *Annals of Oncology*, and others.

Our annual accrual exceeds 1500 patients and, of those, more than 500 are enrolled in breast cancer protocols. We are currently running 15 clinical or translational breast cancer research protocols. Our translational research in breast cancer is mostly focused in the detection, characterization and therapeutic targeting of circulating tumor cells (CTCs). The clinical protocols involve the adjuvant, neoadjuvant and metastatic

settings. In our immediate plans is to initiate a trial specifically designed for geriatric patients.

How is the government supporting breast cancer research in Greece? What is being done concretely in Greece to promote breast cancer research? Are there any particular challenges?

There are some competitive grants and research funding from the Ministry of Health as well as the Ministry of Research and Development that support cancer research, including breast cancer. We, as investigators, have been supported in the past by some of these grants, which unfortunately include very limited financial support. In my opinion, what is most important for promoting breast cancer research in Greece, would be to form a panel of breast cancer experts from all over Greece, who would set priorities and propose actions for establishing a national plan for breast cancer research. Such a policy could exploit the opportunity to transform the enthusiasm of the investigators into tangible results that could benefit women with breast cancer in Greece. ■