

PRESS RELEASE
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BELGIUM HAS THE HIGHEST INCIDENCE OF BREAST CANCER IN THE WORLD!

According to recent figures (source: GLOBOCAN 2018¹), breast cancer was by far the most common cancer among women in 2018 (24%), with 2.1 million people diagnosed and no fewer than 627,000 deaths (72 deaths/hour) worldwide, of which 98,755 in Europe. It is the cancer that causes the most deaths in absolute terms! Breast cancer incidence rates are highest in the so-called developed regions (Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America), but the world record is held by Belgium with 188 cases per 100,000 women. The European Cancer Information System (ECIS) estimates that 404,920 women in Europe were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2018. Fortunately, mortality rates are falling thanks to the research conducted to date, which has led to more personalised treatments. The “BIG against breast cancer” association is celebrating its 20th anniversary in 2019 and continuing to conduct major clinical trials and research programmes around the world to find better breast cancer treatments. What better time than in the run-up to 4 February (World Cancer Day) to present and explain an exceptional not-for-profit organisation in Brussels...

BIG IS CELEBRATING!

(BIG is known in the scientific community as the Breast International Group)

BIG is an international not-for-profit organisation and the world's largest network (over 50 countries across 6 continents) of academic research groups dedicated to finding cures for breast cancer. Its mission is to facilitate and accelerate research on an international scale. Several of BIG's trials and research programmes are considered landmark, introducing particularly innovative designs, contributing to significant breakthroughs or paving the way towards more personalised breast cancer treatment.

In the mid-1990s, the organisation was little more than an idea raised by two oncologists who had set their hearts on increasing the chances of finding a cure for breast cancer. At the time, breast cancer research in Europe was extremely fragmented, with many academic teams working on similar trials in isolation rather than collaborating. **Dr Martine Piccart and Dr Aron Goldhirsch** shared a different vision for the future, one where international teams could discuss the results of their latest research, share ideas for new clinical trials and conduct them together. Based in Brussels, Belgium, BIG is now a network of 59 collaborative academic research groups from Europe, Canada, Latin America, Asia and Australia.

20 YEARS OF SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH AND CLINICAL TRIALS!

About 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer during their lifetime...

Women diagnosed with breast cancer 20 years ago had very few treatment options and a low survival rate. But today, thanks to research efforts, patients have access to more individualised treatments. BIG's ambition is to see the next generation reaping the fruits of its research to beat breast cancer.

Although initially intended to meet a critical need in Europe, the idea behind BIG rapidly attracted collaborative academic groups from other parts of the world. Today, BIG is a network of 59 national and international member groups including over 10,000 of the world's leading breast cancer specialists and representing several thousand hospitals. BIG also works closely with the US National Cancer Institute and the North American Breast Cancer Group, to act as a strong integrating force in the field of breast cancer research. BIG therefore operates as a global network dedicated exclusively to conducting and coordinating breast cancer research based on clinical trials and innovative research programmes.

Over 30 clinical trials and several research programmes are currently being run or are under development under the BIG umbrella. Since 1999, more than 95,000 patients have participated in BIG's clinical trials.

BIG's research aims to answer questions that can have a major impact on patients' lives, and on society.

For example:

- How can we identify which treatments are best suited to an individual patient?
- How does metastatic breast cancer evolve and how can we stop it?
- Which patients can be spared chemotherapy and its side effects?
- What about radiotherapy – are there patients who can be safely spared this treatment?
- What is the best way to treat male breast cancer?
- How should we handle breast cancer and pregnancy?
- Should treatments be given in combination or sequentially, and for how long?
- Can less costly drugs offer effective treatment for certain patients?
- Can we use the body's own immune system to help fight the disease?

Many BIG trials now focus on groups of patients having tumours with specific genetic mutations. The objective is to develop increasingly personalised and precise cancer treatments. BIG trials also anticipate the future, collecting biospecimens for subsequent research to help us better understand tumour biology and learn why some patients respond well to therapies while others do not. This will ultimately help doctors and their patients make better treatment decisions.

BIG study results, obtained from many trials involving tens of thousands of patients worldwide, are considered landmark and have **already changed the way millions of people are treated.** Research is essential to help us better understand breast cancer; through research we can identify biomarkers needed to tailor treatments to individual patients and ensure that laboratory results can be put to rapid and effective use in the clinic while continuing to draw on clinical practice as a means of opening new avenues for laboratory research.

To be continued!

SOME BIG FIGURES

>3,000 hospitals in the network

>10,000 doctors and researchers collaborating as part of the BIG network

95,000 patients involved in BIG clinical studies

59 academic research groups in the BIG network

6 continents

>30 ongoing clinical studies

€83,500,000 invested by BIG between 2012 to 2017

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1. The last release of the GLOBOCAN database (September 2018) includes estimates of the incidence of mortality and prevalence from 36 types of cancer and for all cancers combined in 185 countries of the world. The estimates are presented for 2018, separately for each sex and for the 18 traditional age-groups. The results are available at the IARC (International Agency for Research on Cancer) Global Cancer Observatory web site (<http://gco.iarc.fr/>).