

THE STORY

50 YEARS

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ECRF
EORTC Cancer Research Fund

Supporting EORTC
clinical cancer research & education

THE STORY



“On behalf of the Board, thank you for standing with us and for helping to ensure that independent clinical research continues to improve survival and quality of life for patients across Europe and beyond.”

- COUNT DIEGO DU MONCEAU DE BERGENDAL | ECRF CHAIR



50 Years of Advancing Clinical Cancer Research and Education

The story of the EORTC Cancer Research Fund (ECRF)

Fifty years ago, an idea took shape in the heart of Europe, in Brussels, that advancing clinical research and treatment of cancer could not be achieved alone. No single country, no single institution, could tackle cancer's complexity in isolation. It would take genuine collaboration across borders, sustained vision, and the generosity of people who believed that science, given the right support, could drive therapeutic progress for cancer patients, improving their survival and quality of life.



The Founding Spark

1976

*EORTC —European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer — had been established in 1962, bringing together oncologists in all disciplines across all of Europe in a shared mission to **improve cancer outcomes through international clinical research**. But sustaining that mission required more than scientific ambition. It required solid, transparent, and accountable financial foundations.*

It was Professor Henri Tagnon, EORTC President from 1975 to 1978, who recognised this need and acted on it. Through his personal connection with Sir Ronald Hugh Grierson, a prominent personality then based in Brussels as Director-General for Industry at the European Commission, Tagnon invited him first onto the EORTC Board. A German-born British banker and businessman, Managing Director of the prestigious investment bank S.G. Warburg and later Vice-Chairman of General Electric Company, amongst many other senior roles in business and the arts, Sir Ronald brought to the EORTC Board of oncologists something they

did not have: **the financial expertise, and institutional credibility to place the organisation on a truly solid footing.**

That contribution quickly grew into something larger. In 1976, Sir Ronald established the EORTC Foundation, later renamed the **EORTC Cancer Research Fund (ECRF)**, becoming its founding Chairman. It was through his personal friendship with HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, that royalty first became part of the ECRF story: HRH Prince Philip became the inaugural Honorary President, adding significant visibility to a cause that was, at the time, genuinely pioneering — **EORTC was the first organisation in Europe to design and conduct large-scale, multinational cancer clinical trials across all cancer types.**

Sir Ronald Grierson chaired the Fund for 25 years, a period defined by determined institution-building: establishing trust and appreciation among philanthropic and business circles, attracting supporters, and ensuring that every donation was managed with the integrity that donors, researchers and patients deserved.

2001



Building on strong foundations

Sir Christopher Mallaby, a distinguished British diplomat who had been British Ambassador to Germany and to France, succeeded Sir Ronald as Chairman in 2001, bringing with him a different but equally vital set of skills from a lifetime of forging international relationships across governments, institutions, and boardrooms. Under his leadership, the ECRF entered a new era of philanthropic ambition.

During Sir Mallaby's Chairmanship, the Alliance Boots Group [now known as The Boots Group], began its support of the ECRF. The partnership was born at a gala in Monaco in October 2009, under the patronage of H.S.H.

Prince Albert II of Monaco, where Mr Stefano Pessina and Mrs Ornella Barra were introduced to the Fund's mission – a connection Sir Mallaby and Mrs Agnew (now an ECRF Trustee), nurtured into a transformative partnership that has endured and grown to this day.

Sir Christopher's tenure also coincided with EORTC's own 50th anniversary in 2012, a milestone that brought renewed attention to the organisation's scientific achievements and its continued importance in advancing cancer care. The Fund's philanthropic reach expanded significantly during these years, drawing in donors, cancer charities, and foundations from across Europe and beyond. When he stepped down in 2014, Sir Christopher remained closely connected to the Fund as Honorary Vice President for many years.



2014

A new chapter: governance, growth, and global ambition

In 2014, Count Diego du Monceau de Bergendal assumed the Chairmanship, and asked the harder questions about how the Fund would survive long term. In the early years of his leadership, he undertook a careful review of the Fund's structures, streamlining operations, improving financial flows, and making economies where possible without compromising the Fund's ability to support practice-changing clinical research.

Under his guidance, an independent Finance and Audit Committee was established, and the organisation's investment portfolio was placed on a more systematic footing, ensuring that the Fund's assets are ethically and responsibly managed and that EORTC's clinical trials have a secure foundation not just today, but well into the future. Count Diego du Monceau has also championed the principle that the ECRF's Board of Trustees should reflect the breadth and diversity of Europe itself, drawing on voices and expertise from across the continent to guide the Fund's direction. This remains both a founding principle and an ongoing commitment.

2021

The Honorary Presidents: a thread of commitment

Woven through the entire history of the ECRF is a remarkable succession of Honorary Presidents, each bringing their own voice, networks, and dedication to EORTC's mission.

HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, set the tone in 1976 and was succeeded by HM Queen Sofía of Spain in 1992. HM Queen Silvia of Sweden became Honorary President in 1997 followed by HRH Princess Astrid of Belgium in 2003.

In 2014, HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco assumed the Honorary Presidency, and lent his strong support to the Fund's fundraising efforts, including three gala evenings in Monaco (in 2009, 2015 and 2019) the latter raising €1.2 million to support EORTC's and Europe's leading translational clinical research platform SPECTA.



Since 2021, HRH Princess Dina Mired of Jordan has served as Honorary President, a globally respected cancer advocate, former President of the Union for International Cancer Control, and a mother of a cancer survivor. Her engagement has already extended EORTC's reach in ways that will shape the organisation's future. In 2022, with her strong support, EORTC signed a landmark collaboration agreement with the King Hussein Cancer Centre (KHCC) in Amman, establishing the first Middle East Coordinating Office (MECO) and bringing access to EORTC clinical trials to cancer patients in the region. As Princess Dina Mired said at the signing: "Access to clinical cancer research means a step forward to closing the gap in cancer patient treatment and care."

"Access to clinical cancer research means a step forward to closing the gap in cancer patient treatment and care."

- HRH PRINCESS DINA MIRED OF JORDAN

1976-2026



Fifty years of science, made possible by people

The ECRF's history is, at its heart, a story about people. About an oncologist who knew what the organisation needed and found the right person to provide it. About a banker who turned a blank page into a Fund that has outlasted him by decades. About a diplomat who opened doors and forged partnerships that changed the course of the Fund's ambitions. About a present chairman who has ensured the organisation is financially robust enough to honour its commitments for generations to come. About a succession of remarkable public figures who have given the cause their name, their time, and their commitment. And equally important, about the ECRF's Trustees and Advisors and administrators, who have given their expertise and energy, year after year, because they have seen the impact and progress EORTC has brought to cancer patients across cancer types including rare cancers.

It is also a story about what becomes possible when philanthropy and science work in genuine partnership. Since 1962, EORTC has enrolled around 220,000 patients in clinical research studies across tumour types, and many of these studies have changed practice for treating patients with life-changing and life-saving results. The EORTC Fellowship Programme, launched in 1991, has trained a generation of clinical researchers from around the world and continues to our days with over 240 fellowships been awarded to date.

None of it would have been possible without donors and partners — individuals, foundations, companies, and cancer charities — who chose to invest in science they might never personally need, for patients they will never meet.

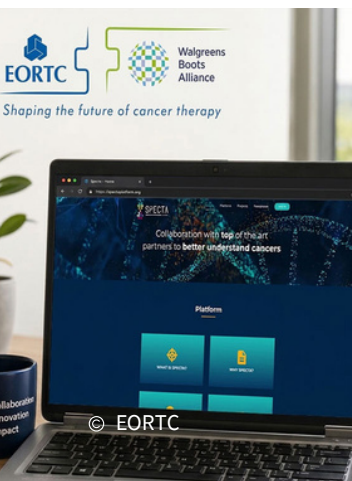
As the ECRF marks its 50th anniversary, that spirit of generosity is more needed than ever. Cancer remains one of the defining challenges of our time. The research that will change outcomes tomorrow is being designed today — and it needs your support.

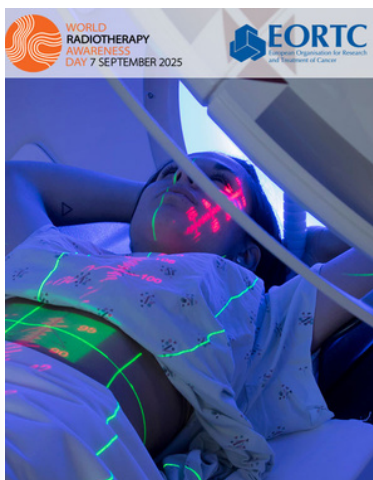
50 years in, the science has never been more promising. The trials being designed today will change how cancer is treated in the coming decades. Help us make sure they happen.

Donate

You can also help support EORTC's practice-changing clinical research to unleash scientific breakthrough and transform cancer patients' lives. [Donate today.](#)







**WORLD
RADIOTHERAPY
AWARENESS
DAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2025**

EORTC
European Organisation for Research
and Treatment of Cancer

50 YEARS

**ECRF
timeline**





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Donate

