

**“Overcoming Cancer With Research” – an EU Project for the General Public  
St. Anna Children’s Cancer Research Institute, Trailblazers, and Hadschi Bankhofer on  
Successes, Hope, and Courage**

*Presenter - Hadschi Bankhofer*



The significant increase in the recovery rates of cancer-stricken children and youths is one of the biggest successes in research history. In order to educate the general public, the initiative “Overcoming Cancer With Research” was launched. This science communication project is supported by the EU and provides information on the rapid progress in children’s cancer research. In addition, problems and social barriers, which the patients face after overcoming their illness, are depicted.

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*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

- *Prof. Schlögel, you are in charge of the Federal Ministry of Health, Family Affairs and Youth. Why is it so important to raise public awareness on the peripheral activities in medicine?*



**1. SC Hon.Prof. Dr. Robert Schlögel**

Cancer among children and youths is an ‘orphan illness’. This means that it is a rare illness, which only affects a small number of people. We document around 250 incidences per year in Austria. In comparison, Germany has around 2.000 incidences per year. Naturally, these children and youths require the best medical care possible. A large number of public and

private resources are required in order to research and treat rare illnesses. Exceptional, high-quality medical care is available to cancer-stricken children and youths in the industrial nations of Europe, due to an excellent healthy system and intensive research. We are proud that Austria, with the St. Anna Children's Cancer Research Institute, has an institute, which has attained a high degree of international recognition due to its achievements. The public must be informed about the outstanding accomplishments of research in this area. The public must comprehend that treatment concepts can only be continually improved through constant, promoted research. Information, especially for abstract research issues, must be attractive, placating, and prepared in a simple, comprehensible manner in order to find an attentive ear.

*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

*Prof. Gadner, you are medical director of St. Anna Children's Hospital, the director of the St. Anna Cancer Research Institute, a paediatrician, as well as the coordinator of the EU-Project "Forschen heilt Krebs" ("Overcoming Cancer With Research").*

- *What are the goals of this initiative?*



## **2. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Helmut Gadner**

Many people think that cancer in children and youths still means a death sentence. Cancer is definitely a life-threatening illness, which must be treated with radical therapy methods. However, only a few know that we can effectively cure three out of every four children today. The fact that the survival rates of these young patients can be drastically increased is one of the biggest successes in modern medicine. This can ultimately be ascribed to intensive research, both in the laboratory as well as directly on the patients. Another contribution is the international network of children's cancer experts. Therapy optimisation trials were introduced, which have led to up-to-date uniform treatment protocols. Unfortunately, we are still not able to cure all cancer-stricken children. We lose one fourth of our patients to cancer. The challenge of the coming years will be to gain an even better understanding of the biological characteristics of these malignant cancer cells. We will only be able to develop methods, which offer these children and youths a chance of survival, if we increase our

knowledge. Our project, “Overcoming Cancer With Research”, should inform the public what children’s cancer research is about, and what we are dealing with every day.

*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

- *Prof. Masera, you are medical director of the Department for Paediatric Oncology and Haematology at the University Clinic in Monza, Italy, as well as director of the Italian trial group for children with leukaemia. You intensively deal with the life situation of children and youths after their affliction with cancer. How can our society and our health system contribute [to these patients]?*



### **3. Univ.-Prof. Dr. Giuseppe Masaera, Monza, Italien**

Paediatric oncology is currently confronted with the following set of problems: we have been able to substantially increase the survival rates and recovery chances. Today, hundreds of thousands of people have recovered from cancer in their childhood. However, there is very little information available on former child-cancer patients, whose therapy was two or more decades ago. Only a few of them suffer from late medical, psychological, and social effects, which have to be treated by specialist. Most survivors possess a high degree of resilience as well as characteristics of post-traumatic development: a large amount of psychological maturity, empathy, and a high appreciation of life.

*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

- *Ms. Schmid, you are a long-time survivor, a certified psychologist, and committed to the after-treatment programs for former child-cancer patients. Many former child-cancer patients still suffer from the late effects years after their illness. What is it like with you?*



#### **4. Dorothee Schmid, certified psychologist, former child-cancer patient**

Many former child-cancer patients still suffer for a long, and in part, lifelong period from so-called late effects. These effects, however, can appear very different in each case. I, for example, cannot have any children because the tumour was clinging to an ovary, which they had to remove, and my womb was removed as well. This is the reason why I have to take hormones every day, in order to postpone menopause. Hormone substitution therapy is also partially disputed, but in order to stave off osteoporosis, I do not have a choice. Nevertheless, careful attention must be paid, for example, to the dosage. One should not take more than recommended because this increases the risk of breast cancer. It is somehow all connected, and you do not have one single doctor, who accompanies you through everything. You have to obtain your information from physicians, dermatologist, gynaecologists, radiologists, etc.



*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

- *Mr. Kort, you are manager of the German Children's Cancer Foundation and partner of the "Overcoming Cancer With Research" project. The „Waldpiratencamp“ (Forest Pirates Camp) and the Rainbow Trip, which will take place next within the framework of the project, will be financed by the Germany Children's Cancer Foundation. Tell us more about these activities.*



#### **5. Jens Kort, Manger of the German Children's Cancer Foundation**

In the Forest Pirates Camp, children and young adults are able to recover from their cancer and therapy. Last year, we had more than 400 children and youths. Not only the patients are able to take part, but their siblings are also invited to the recreational activities of the camp because they also suffer from the big changes in the family, which arise from the illness.

The camp serves as a place where patients can regain their physical ability and self-confidence, as well as a piece of unencumbered childhood. Specialised teachers and qualified, voluntary aides care for the children.

This year will be the 16<sup>th</sup> time that the Rainbow Trip has taken place. During this bicycle tour, former young cancer patients embark on a rather fastidious route, and visit the centres for paediatric oncology and haematology. This year, for example, the route goes from Munich via Augsburg, Ulm, Tübingen, through the Black Forest, to Freiburg. By doing this, the participants want to encourage the young patients: "Look here, we were ill – really ill – and are in top form again today. You can do this too!". This is their message. This way, they are able to make an important contribution to building up the morale of current patients. In addition, the athletes will, naturally, also be contributing to raising public awareness on the issue of "Cancer in Childhood". A group of around 40 cyclists in rainbow jerseys will certainly be noticeable. There are always questions, discussions, and public reporting wherever the group show up.

However, let me tell you about a further focus of our work. Prof. Gardner mentioned the large role of research, which has led to enormous success in the area of children's oncology. The German Children's Cancer Foundation also financially contributes to many research projects. We attach particular importance to projects, which offer quick benefits to patients, and which

directly contribute to increasing the effectiveness of therapies and limiting the long-term effects and side effects.

*Hadschi Bankhofer:*

- *Mr. Löhr, you were diagnosed with a bone tumour in your left leg at the age of 14. You are considered to be cured today. Two years ago, you climbed the Großglockner, together with a group of former child-cancer patients, in four days. What was the point of this activity?*



#### **6. Alexander Löhr, „Survivor“ (former child-cancer patient)**

When I suffered from cancer as a teenager, I wasn't as scared of losing the battle with cancer as I was with losing my physical abilities. Tennis played a very important role in my life. During my long stay in the hospital, I became painfully aware of this. Due to my cancer condition, my ankle joint was destroyed. I received an artificial replacement. With the ascent to Großglockner in 2006, we wanted to prove to the public: we are just as fit and able as our healthy peers. The victory over cancer made us all mentally strong. This special characteristic must be acknowledged by society. The solidarity of the survivors during those four days as we ascended the summit was incredibly strong. When I reached the summit, I was overcome with the same great feelings as when I was told that I had been cured. I managed something unique.