

Introducing the new BSMO President (2023-2026): Interview with Prof. E. de Azambuja

1. In your opinion, what have been the key moments/main achievements in the history of the BSMO to date?

The BSMO, under the guidance of the previous boards, have made much progress in oncology for Belgian oncologists and patients. There is a strong commitment to education, drug access and clinical trials. The conduct of some clinical trials and research under the BSMO was crucial for a better understanding of different diseases, as well as some guidance during the COVID pandemic.

2. What projects are currently in progress/planned in the near future?

The conduct of a clinical trial called GENE02 is under discussion. Some other clinical trials, such as BALLET, are about to complete accrual. Also, the reimbursement of supra-regional MDTs (like the BITOX initiative and the national Molecular tumour Board) which have helped many patients and doctors (different specialities). In addition, the discussion of different educational meetings is intense.

3. What are your future plans/aims/goals as a president of the BSMO?

There are many discussions initiated by the previous board that should move forward. Personally, I do believe that the society should invest in education, training, diversity and equal opportunities to all oncologists in Belgium. Continuous education is very important, as well as the training of young oncologists. We may discuss creating a young oncologist group. I also would like to launch one research fellowship in collaboration with a sponsoring entity. I also would like to revisit the available task forces in BSMO to ensure continuous discussion and activities in many of them. We should re-initiate the discussion of getting BJMO in PubMed if possible – this would attract more papers from our Belgian colleagues.

For medical oncology, the next years will be challenging in terms of drug approval/reimbursements due to an increase in costs. BSMO should play an important role in the discussion with RIZIV/INAMI and the Ministry of Health. Belgium is a champion in clinical trials, but still, we lack access to some important drugs due to long discussions during the approval

process. We should try to shorten this gap to allow patients to access clinically important drugs faster than nowadays.

In addition, optimising working environments for all Belgian oncologists and assisting/providing guidance for optimal oncological collaborations in case of network formations. Of course, the current Board should embrace all decision and future actions.

4. Would you briefly introduce the other new members of the board and their roles?

This is the entire board in alphabetic order: Barbara Brouwers (AZ Sint-Jan Brugge), Evandro de Azambuja (Institut Jules Bordet Brussels, President), Christel Fontaine (UZ Brussel), Christine Gennigens (CHU de Liege), Willem Lybaert (VITAZ - UZA Sint-Niklaas), Eline Naert (UZ Gent), Punie Kevin (GZA Antwerpen), Cédric Van Marcke (UCL Saint-Luc Brussels), Florence Van Ryckeghem (AZ Glorieux Ronse), Annelies Verbiest (UZA Antwerpen).

We will have a first call on March 6th to discuss the function of every member.

5. How often does the board/president change? Are they elected officials or may they step up as candidates themselves?

The elections for board members occur every four years, and anyone can propose him/herself as a candidate. The maximum number of members is ten. This year, we had three board members from the previous governance that were re-elected and seven new members that were elected for the first time. Just after the results elections, we discuss the president and vice president based on the numbers of total votes and experience. As previously mentioned, each board member function is discussed in a subsequent meeting.

Acknowledgements: First, I would like to acknowledge the previous board for having guided the society during the difficult time of COVID pandemic and for being able to accomplish many things. Secondly, I would like to thank all the oncologists in Belgium who voted for me and my new board colleagues for their trust in selecting me as president for the next four years. Finally, to thank you, my colleague and board member, Kevin Punie, who kindly reviewed this interview.