

VOL. 1 ISSUE 1.

NEWSLETTER

ABOUT DISPARITIES IN SURGICAL SPECIALIZATION AND
EDUCATION IN CANCER TRAINING



WHAT IS DISSECT COST ACTION CA 24158?

DISSECT is a program supported by COST (Cooperation for Science and Technology) that aims to identify and address disparities in cancer surgery training and education.

OUR AIM

We aim to foster knowledge exchange between surgical teams from high- and low-resource settings, to enhance multidisciplinary approach to cancer treatment, technical expertise, mentorship, research capacity and promote innovation.

OUR TEAM

The Team consists of the Management Committee and 5 Working Groups, each managed by a Lead and a Co-Lead. Participants include more than 100 DISSECT Members from more than 18 countries from Europe, North & Latin America and Asia.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT?

DISSECT COST Action aligns with Europe's Beating Cancer Plan to ensure equitable access to high standards of care and to reduce cancer-related inequalities.





DISSECT KICK-OFF MEETING, 25 SEPTEMBER 2025, BRUSSELS

The kick-off Management Committee meeting of COST Action CA24158 – Disparities In Surgical Specialization and Education in Cancer Training (DISSECT) was held at the COST Action Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

Prof. Wim Ceelen, ESSO Board Member and Professor of Surgical Oncology at Ghent University, Belgium, was appointed as Action Chair. He emphasized the vital role of international cooperation in strengthening surgical oncology education and driving innovation to improve patient care.

Supporting him in the leadership team are Vice-Chair Dr. Mariela Vasileva-Slaveva (Bulgaria) and Grant Holder Representative Dr. Marija Rankovic (Belgium). Dr. Miroslava Chortova (Bulgaria) was elected Science Communication Coordinator, while Dr. Sarah Cosyns (Belgium) will serve as Grant Awarding Coordinator.

The launch of DISSECT marks the start of a four-year collaborative initiative aimed at uniting experts from diverse disciplines and countries to enhance surgical oncology education, encourage innovation, and establish sustainable European research and training networks.



MEET THE TEAM

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MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



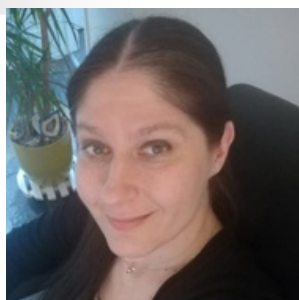
Prof. Wim Ceelen
Chair

Wim Ceelen is a surgeon-scientist at Ghent University, Belgium. As a surgical oncologist, he focuses on GI tract cancer, peritoneal metastases, and soft tissue sarcoma. He leads the Experimental Surgery lab (SurgX), which conducts preclinical and clinical research in tumor biophysics, intraperitoneal drug delivery, and the pathophysiology of peritoneal metastases. He holds a master's degree in statistics and data science and teaches evidence-based medicine and research methodology.



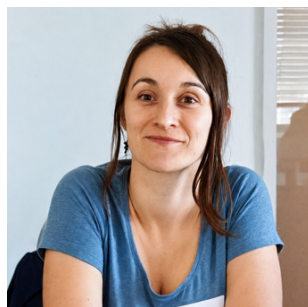
Dr. Mariela Slaveva-Vasileva
Vice-Chair

Mariela Vasileva is a general surgeon from Bulgaria, with a special interest in breast cancer diagnosis and treatment. She is also a founder and chair of the Bulgarian Breast Cancer Association. She is developing an app for breast cancer patients called "LIFE" and a virtual tumor biobank called "COSMOS". She has participated in numerous educational activities of the Bulgarian Breast Cancer Association and European Society of Surgical Oncology, and she is also a member of the European School of Oncology and ESMO.



Dr. Marija Rankovic
Grant Holder Manager

Marija works as an Educational Program Manager at the European Society of Surgical Oncology (ESSO), a DISSECT grant-holding institution. Working closely with the Education & Training Committee, she coordinates the implementation of ESSO's educational strategy and the delivery of programs. Within DISSECT, she serves as the Grant Holder Manager and Scientific Representative, overseeing project coordination and supporting its scientific and educational implementation. Marija holds a PhD in Biochemistry and has a background in medical education and scientific communication.



Dr. Sarah Cosyns
Grant Awarding Coordinator

Sarah Cosyns is a postdoctoral researcher at the Laboratory for Experimental Surgery (SurgX), affiliated with Ghent University, Belgium. Her research focuses on translational oncology, peritoneal metastasis, and innovative intraperitoneal treatment strategies, combining experimental and clinical approaches. Within the COST EU Action DISSECT, Sarah serves as Grant Awarding Coordinator. In this role, she coordinates the evaluation and management of grants supporting international collaboration, mobility, training, and dissemination activities across the DISSECT network.



Dr. Miroslava Chortova
Science Communication Coordinator

Miroslava is a plastic surgery resident based in Bulgaria. She is currently pursuing her PhD in regenerative medicine, focusing on autologous mesenchymal stem cells as a therapeutic modality. She holds a Master's degree in autologous breast reconstruction from the European Reconstructive Microsurgery School and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Her medical interests are oriented towards autologous tissue reconstruction and tissue engineering. Within the DISSECT COST Action, she serves as Science Communication Coordinator, helping to disseminate project activities and communicate deliverables to the multiple stakeholders involved.



MEET THE TEAM

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WORKING GROUPS



Prof. Jean Calleja Agius

WG 1 Leader

Identification and
evaluation of
disparities

Prof. Jean Calleja Agius is a specialist in Obstetrics and Gynecology based in Malta.

She is a Fellow of the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology and the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland. She obtained her PhD at UCL. She led the Dept of Anatomy at the Medical University of Malta for 9 years and is now focusing on international projects and collaborations, including the GYNOCARE and DISSECT COST Actions.



Dr. Carmela Caballero

WG 2 Leader

Building research capacity

Dr. Carmela Caballero is a surgeon, researcher, and advocate dedicated to improving cancer awareness and education, particularly within the Filipino migrant community in Europe. She worked as a Senior Medical Advisor for international clinical trials at the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer and the Breast International Group. Carmela was the previous Steering Committee Chair of the Young ESSO. Her career reflects commitment to combining research expertise with meaningful impact.



Dr. Henry Smith

WG 3 Leader

Multidisciplinary teams
knowledge exchange

Henry Smith is a colorectal surgeon in Denmark. He is also an Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, and leads his own research group, that focuses on optimising treatment of patients with colorectal cancer. He is a member of the Danish Colorectal Cancer Group (DCCG) Surgical Working Group and has multiple roles within the European Society of Surgical Oncology.



Dr. Stefan Stättner

WG 4 Leader

Surgical Mentorship

Dr. Stefan Stättner, a senior lecturer, worked at various national and international clinics after completing his studies in Vienna, specializing in liver, biliary tract, and pancreatic surgery throughout his career. His postdoctoral thesis (Habilitation) at the Paracelsus Medical University (PMU), Salzburg, was also dedicated to this area, as were his research interests. As a board member or member of numerous professional societies - including the European Society of Surgical Oncology, the European-African Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association, and the European Neoendocrine Tumor Society - he maintains excellent contacts with internationally active colleagues and is thus always up-to-date with the latest scientific developments.



Dr. Karol Polom

WG 5 Leader

Innovation

Karol Polom, based in Poland, is currently a Professor at Wielkopolskie Centrum Onkologii (Greater Poland Cancer Center). Karol Polom brings experience from previous roles at European Society of Surgical Oncology (ESSO), Akademia Medycznych i Społecznych Nauk Stosowanych, and Medical University of Gdansk. Karol Polom holds a 2000 - 2006 Doctor of Medicine (MD) @ Poznan University of Medical Sciences. Experienced Specialist with a demonstrated history of working in the education management industry. Skilled in Clinical Research, Medical Education, Life Sciences, Oncology, and Surgical Oncology. Strong professional graduated from Akademia Medyczna im. Karola Marcinkowskiego in Poznań. Experienced surgeon at Siena University Hospital and former chair of European Young Surgeons and Alumni Club (EYSAC).



Applications

Grants

DISSECT IS INVESTING IN YOUR IDEAS



**Dissemination
Conference Grant**



ITC Conference Grant



**Short-Term Scientific
Mission Grant**



Virtual Mobility Grant



**Young Researcher and
Innovator Conference Grant**

Check the eligibility criteria and choose the Grant that suits you!

Find more about the Grants [here!](#)

UPCOMING EVENT: RESEARCH WORKSHOP GENT, BELGIUM 24-25 Sep 2026



We are pleased to invite you to the upcoming DISSECT Research Workshop in Gent this September!

This event brings together experts and researchers to address research building capacity and advance research collaboration. Participants will have the chance to develop essential research skills in **Systematic reviews** and **Meta-analysis**, gaining the basic knowledge and skills to conduct a high-quality evidence synthesis, as well as how to implement innovative tools in this process efficiently and ethically.

Participants will take part in strategic discussions across five specialized Working Groups, covering topics from identifying training disparities and building research capacity to surgical mentorship and innovation.

This event is open to medical professionals, researchers, and academic stakeholders interested in surgical education and oncology.

Participants attending are encouraged to review current WG objectives, as the sessions will focus on evaluating recent achievements and planning future activities.

Organized by:



Prof. Wim Ceelen
DISSECT Chair



Dr. Sarah Cosyns
Grant Award Coordinator

Access links will be provided to registered virtual attendees prior to the event.

Have a question? Contact us at:
sarah.cosyns@ugent.be

We look forward to your active participation in Ghent or online!

More information and the full event program at:
 www.cost-dissect.eu



Format of the event: **Hybrid (on-site and online)**



Sint Baafshuis (Room 1.05), Biezekapelstraat 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium



This is an EU-funded event and is **REGISTRATION-FREE** for participation



**Funded by
the European Union**

THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF DISSECT



CONNECTING PEOPLE. REDUCING DISPARITIES.
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CANCER SURGERY.



The success of DISSECT is driven by the dedication, expertise, and enthusiasm of its members. Through collaboration across disciplines, institutions, and countries, we are building a stronger foundation for innovation, equity, and excellence in cancer surgery.



We encourage all members to stay engaged, participate in upcoming activities, contribute to ongoing initiatives, and continue sharing knowledge within the network. Together, we can accelerate progress and create lasting impact for patients, healthcare professionals, and researchers worldwide.



Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the DISSECT community.



Stay Connected

Follow our latest activities and opportunities through our communication channels:



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See you in the next issue!