

Supporting Fondazione Ieo-Monzino Ets's project for a prevention model in oncology

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Fondazione Ieo-Monzino Ets is a non-profit Italian organization established in 1994 to support the scientific research of the European Institute of Oncology and the Centro Cardiologico Monzino. Both institutions are scientific institutes dedicated to research, hospitalization and healthcare in the fields of oncology and cardiovascular medicine, respectively. Today, cancer remains a leading cause of death worldwide, largely because screening is unavailable for most life-threatening cancers. As a result, many cancers are detected too late, when outcomes are often fatal. IEO was founded in 1994 by Umberto Veronesi with the goal of creating an innovative model of healthcare and advanced oncology research on an international scale. Through the integration of activities such as prevention, diagnosis, research and training, IEO has achieved high levels of specialization and received numerous awards worldwide. Cancer prevention has become a significant focus in medical research in recent years, addressing different levels of prevention and recognizing the unique characteristics of each individual. Through effective prevention and screening initiatives, the incidence of cancer can be reduced, and early diagnosis facilitated, leading to shorter and less intensive treatment courses. An individual's risk of developing cancer is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including physical, chemical, and biological elements in their living and occupational environments, as well as behavioural and socio-cultural factors such as diet, smoking, alcohol consumption, fertility, and psychological disposition. This understanding has led to the development of sophisticated

mathematical prediction models that assess cancer risk based on the presence or absence of specific individual factors. These models can also support the evaluation of treatments and interventions. However, a calculated "high risk for cancer" does not necessarily mean cancer will develop, and conversely, cancer can occur in individuals deemed "low risk". As such, no single model is sufficient to provide indications for the entire population. A multitude of factors must be carefully evaluated for each individual to guide effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Over the years, the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** (NaEPF) has supported several health promotion and scientific research projects to enhance community well-being. Funding medical research contributes to the global pool of knowledge about diseases, treatments and health systems, and creates educational and training opportunities for students and young scientists, helping to build the next generation of researchers and healthcare professionals. NaEPF's commitment continues today with the support to European Institute of Oncology and the Centro Cardiologico Monzino for a project of medical and scientific research with the aim to draw a model for early diagnosis and prevention in cancer, which last until 2026. Through adequate evaluation of personal and familiar medical history and through genetic analysis, the project is addressed to identify the "risk for cancer" and early detection of cancer at a molecular level on blood sample.

With the increasing understanding of the model of carcinogenesis and availability of modifiable risk

factors, the paradigm shift in approach to cancer management is increasingly from cancer treatment to cancer prevention. The innovative approach of the IEO project stands in the evaluation of genetic factors to personalize prevention. Genetic testing can offer prevention, but it has an important psychological impact on the patient and family. Psycho-oncology is an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of physical, psychological, social, and behavioral aspects of the cancer experience for both patients and caregivers. Cancer can result in relevant changes not only in the individual, but also in the whole family system. Thus, the presence of the psychologist is indispensable in the oncology clinic helping the patient in his self-understanding, in understanding his pathology and in prolonging his healthy life or approaching the end-of-life. Overall, this is a transversal prevention project that takes full care of healthy people and cancer patient starting from lifestyle habits, diagnosis, genetic testing, surgery, psychological counseling, and checks. Modifying the current management of cancer from conceptual medicine to precision medicine, which is clinical management tailored to the individual patient using predictive nomograms, genetics and genomics, would treat the patients more effectively.

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Peter Schwendinger, President of the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation

FONDAZIONE IEO-MONZINOMAGAZINE

The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation supporting cancer research and prevention

Corporate and family foundations play a vital role in supporting medical and scientific research, contributing to the development of innovative projects focused on prevention, early diagnosis and treatment.

Within this context, the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation is supporting a project dedicated to developing a personalized approach to cancer prevention. We spoke with Peter Schwendinger, President of the Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation, to explore the motivations behind this commitment and the value of collaboration in advancing medical research.

The Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation supports projects across a wide range of fields. What led you to make medical and scientific research, as well as cancer prevention, one of your priorities?

Looking back over the Foundation's twenty-five years of activity, it becomes clear that medical and scientific research has always been an integral part of our work. It has never been a separate area of intervention, but rather a natural expression of Elsa Peretti's vision.

Elsa believed that caring for people also meant supporting knowledge. Not because research was an end in itself, but because it is one of the most effective ways we have to improve people's lives and contribute to a more informed and more equitable society.

She shared this vision with Professor Umberto Veronesi, who saw medicine as a profoundly human discipline, capable of combining scientific rigour, prevention and genuine care for the individual. Over the years, we have sought to remain faithful to that legacy by supporting research institutes and universities, but above all the women and men who devote their expertise every day to advancing our understanding of disease and opening up new possibilities for treatment.

When assessing a research project, which elements carry the greatest weight in your decision-making, and what role do scientific innovation and tangible impact on people's lives play in that process?

Naturally, we look at the scientific quality of a project and the benefits it may bring to patients. But we do not stop there.

We are equally interested in how a research project approaches its central question, how effectively it brings different areas of expertise into dialogue, and whether it has the robustness needed to generate knowledge that can be shared, built upon and sustained over time.

Innovation is not simply a matter of increasingly sophisticated technology. Sometimes it lies in

the ability to look at a problem from a different perspective. That is often where the most significant advances begin. Even when a project addresses a highly specialised field, good research can generate knowledge that extends well beyond its original objectives and contributes to progress across many other areas of medicine.

How important is it for a foundation to ensure continuity over time for the projects it supports, including through multi-year funding?

Research requires time. That may appear to be a limitation, but it is, in fact, one of its greatest strengths. Philanthropy has a particular relationship with time. It can accompany processes that require years of work, validation and scientific exchange, without being driven by the need for immediate results.

For this reason, when a project demonstrates scientific rigour, quality and a credible long-term perspective, we believe that continuity of support becomes an essential part of its value. Multi-year funding enables researchers to work with greater stability and to focus fully on their scientific mission. The same principle increasingly guides our work across other areas of the Foundation's activities. Building long-term partnerships means giving good ideas the time they need to become meaningful results.

What was the main reason that led you to support this project, which aims to develop a personalised model of cancer prevention?

What convinced us most was the way this project approaches prevention.

Prevention is perhaps the most far-sighted form of care. It means seeking to understand the individual before the disease, recognising that cancer risk arises from the interaction of biological, genetic, psychological and environmental factors.

We appreciated both the scientific strength of the proposal and its ability to bring together different areas of expertise within a single personalised prevention model. This is research that does not separate knowledge from its practical application. And it is precisely this transition - from research to improving people's lives - that philanthropy can help make possible.

This project brings together research, genetics, psychological support and personalised medicine. In your view, how important is it to support multidisciplinary approaches such as this?

Over the past few decades, we have come to understand that complex problems rarely find solutions within a single discipline. Medicine itself has evolved. Today it recognises the individual in all their complexity, acknowledging that health arises from the continuous interaction of biological, psychological and social dimensions.

For this reason, we are particularly interested in projects that encourage dialogue between different professional disciplines. It is not simply a matter of bringing together different areas of expertise, but of achieving a more complete understanding of the individual.

We believe this approach will play an increasingly important role in the future of medicine.

What value do you attach to your collaboration with Fondazione IEO-MONZINO in supporting research projects such as this one?

For us, every philanthropic partnership begins with trust.

Trust in the quality of the institutions with which we collaborate, in the integrity of their work, and in the responsibility with which they use the resources entrusted to them. In Fondazione IEO-MONZINO we have found all of these qualities: an institution that combines scientific excellence with genuine attention to patients and a long-term vision.

There is, however, another aspect that we consider equally important. By its very nature, good research is a shared asset. Every new piece of knowledge has the potential to generate benefits that extend far beyond the project from which it originated.

This is why we continue to invest in research. We believe that supporting knowledge means helping to build a future in which people can live longer, healthier and more informed lives. It is a responsibility that philanthropy can embrace with humility, but also with conviction.

