

UICC

Uniting the cancer control community

Research Features speaks to **Cary Adams**, CEO of Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), about their innovative approaches to tackling the cancer issues the world of today and tomorrow is facing. Cary shares his experience of leadership at an international level and the rewards and challenges it can bring.

Working alongside key collaborators, such as the World Health Organization and other UN agencies, the non-governmental organisation is dedicated to taking the lead in uniting the cancer community to reduce the global cancer burden, promote greater equity, and integrate cancer control into the world health and development agenda. UICC's determined efforts are reaping rich rewards – clearly evident in the fruition of significant successes. The NGO is giving cancer a run for its money – and not just economically. ►



How would you define your role and responsibilities as the CEO of UICC?

Within the organisation, I play a significant role that involves working on behalf of our membership around the world, as well as our board, to make sure that UICC delivers exactly what is set out in our long-term business plan. As the CEO, my job is to make sure that we do have the impact globally that we plan to have.

Being a CEO of an international non-governmental organisation is probably the most challenging thing I've ever done in my life. Your whole role is to influence individuals and organisations from around the world who really don't have to listen to you.

To get the World Health Organization and the United Nations to listen to the people who have a passion about improving cancer control around the world means that we have to constantly work with individuals and organisations that really could be doing something else. Therefore, to deliver our agenda, the agenda of many, many people around the world who care about cancer, we have to work in a very open space where advocacy and influencing are absolutely critical to the role of the CEO.

So, it's a very challenging job. I really love doing it – people that I know who do equivalent jobs for other international organisations thoroughly enjoy their roles as well – but it is extremely challenging and tiring at the same time and I think I've aged a bit in the last few years.

What drove you to change career from banking in 2010 to leading UICC?

Well, I think it was a sequence of things over many years but I guess we all get to a point in our life when we recognise our career in one domain is probably coming to an end, and certainly mine was.

I thoroughly enjoyed working in the banking industry for many years but it was becoming obvious to me that it was time to move on. I really didn't know too much about what I wanted to do. I then worked with a charity in the UK for a couple of years and I really respected what they were doing, so I knew after that I wanted to do something which had social impact. And then, just by real good fortune, a head hunter who had been appointed by UICC to find a CEO contacted me, and sent me the job description.

It really resonated with me immediately, not least because, like most people, my life has been touched by cancer, by losing friends and family. But importantly, whilst the nature of the role just seemed to be so demanding and challenging, the end point of doing a good job would be that you would influence the lives of future generations – that was a very compelling attraction to apply for the role. And of course, I was then extremely lucky to secure it seven years ago.

Last year you were awarded 'CEO of the year' at the International and European Associations conference. How did it feel to be given recognition for your work and UICC's successes?

It was extremely humbling. The International and European Associations Conference is such a well-respected event, and the organisation behind it also has a great reputation itself.

It was first of all incredibly humbling that, one, my name was even considered and secondly to win it made a very enjoyable evening, to say the least, because many of my team were there when the announcement was made. But I would say that, like most awards, the award for me as an individual is completely down to the hard work of so many other people. It's very difficult as a CEO to achieve anything without great people around you, without the support of a board, without the involvement of key individuals around the world. The judgement of any CEO's performance, at the end of the day, is the impact that their organisation has and the method through which they achieve that impact. So, it was humbling at a personal level, but it was also a very proud moment. It was, for me, a tick to say that the UICC had achieved so much in the previous four years.

And just to reinforce that point, this year we also won an award for conference development for our World Cancer Congress. I think this again confirms that what we have in UICC is a team that's passionate about working with its membership around the world. So we're very proud of the fact that

all of our hard work has been recognised by these organisations with such good reputations.

Thinking back over the last 12 months, what do you think has been UICC's most significant achievement?

Now that's an interesting question because we operate in so many different domains. But I will pull out one or two things that I am personally proud of. They're probably not the things that necessarily grab the attention of the media, but nonetheless they are so important in terms of taking things forward for the global cancer control community.

First would be the extension of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Model List of Essential Medicines. To give you some background information, all countries around the world look towards the WHO as the leading guide on how they should be addressing health within their country. And the Essential Medicines List is essentially what it says – it's a list of medicines that should be available in every country to help address all the diseases which they face.

However, the Essential Medicines List has not been reviewed for about ten years for the issue of cancer. Collaborating with nearly 100 experts from around the world, UICC worked diligently with WHO staff to put forward a recommendation to increase the number of medicines on that list from 30 to 46. After such a significant increase in such a short period of time, I must admit that there was a certain amount of celebration last year when we were able to get this agreed by the WHO and to publicise the achievement around the world.

Our success will impact the lives of people around the world in the next 10, 20, 30 years, as those medicines could come available to other countries who can use them to resolve childhood cancers, breast cancers, and other cancers. So I would say that was probably the most rewarding win in the last twelve months. But, of course, that's very much in the background as one of our successes. Meanwhile there have been lots of other

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more public wins, such as when the United Nations (UN) announced in New York that cancer and other non-communicable diseases, or NCDs as they're called, are in the UN's sustainable development goals. We worked diligently with about 40-50 organisations from around the world, if not more, to ensure that cancer and other NCDs would actually feature in the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals as they previously haven't.

I believe that augurs well for the future. Every country around the world will now need to position cancer, and the other NCDs, in the same place as they would be addressing communicable diseases like HIV/Aids and malaria. So again, a significant international agreement, which will filter through to national policies and national actions over the next 10 to 15 or 20 years.

Could you describe UICC's long-term strategy?

Our long-term strategy is actually defined by our board, and it's reviewed every four years. A couple of years ago the

board spent two and a half days discussing what UICC should be doing over the next 10, 15, 20 years. They came up with some conclusions which I think are quite compelling and actually filter straight down to what we do on a day-to-day basis.

The first one they decided was that UICC's role should be to maximise resources for reach and impact. For example, how can we play a role to get more resources into the cancer community, and then disseminate that to the people who need it in the most impactful way? And of course, that's one of the reasons that we're focusing on capacity building globally. But our ambition is that we should use all new technologies, social media, etc. to get information out to people who need it in the most impactful way.

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After all our global wins, such as achieving targets for cancer and the NCDs to be in the Sustainable Development Goals, the second area of long-term focus is about ensuring that governments follow through on those commitments and those promises and establishing in the mind-set of all of our members around the world that they have to play a role to support governments to fulfil those obligations.

They may be obligations, for example, to reduce tobacco use by 30% by 2025. Well the question is, how can the cancer community work with governments to make sure that they put in place the laws required, the tax rises required, to achieve that objective? Because those objectives weren't just made up. They were considered long



The UICC Team celebrated 1,000 member organisations in the Parc des Eaux-Vives in Geneva, Switzerland.

and hard by the World Health Organization, as being a combination of targets, which at the end of the day will benefit society when it comes to cancer and NCDs. So one of our key ambitions is to play a role to hold others to account who make promises, not to agitate them but to make sure that we support, guide and help them in those ambitions.

And then the third area that we are looking at we call 'Leading and Inspiring a Movement'. That's really about growing the UICC membership base from 1,000 organisations at the moment, and doubling it over the next 5-10 years. But it's also about engaging individuals, identifying young leaders of the future, and possibly some of the researchers that we were talking about earlier, and giving them the opportunity to become the global leaders of the future.

Well, where are those young people today? If I look at my board and my president now, I've got Mary Gospodarowicz from Canada, I've got Tezer Kutluk from Turkey, and I've got Sanchia Aranda from Australia. All incredibly successful, ambitious, energetic individuals who play an absolutely critical role in the way the world thinks about health in the future. We're the ones from twenty years ago – how did we get through it? There are, amongst many others, some key questions: How do we identify young talent

now, so that they are given a good chance to play a global role at some point in the future? How can we help all of our members to hopefully do a better job at working with us on World Cancer Day, attending the Congress, the Leader's Summit?

The three areas of what we want to achieve long-term, which translate into the work we do on a day-to-day basis, are threefold: firstly, how do we maximise resources for

reach and impact; secondly, how do we take responsibility and hold people to account who have made commitments to help the cancer community in the future by helping, guiding, and supporting them; and finally, what should we do to lead and inspire a global movement over time, so that more people feel comfortable talking about cancer, because they understand that there are things that have been done to actually address it.

Detail

BIO

Born in London, Cary Adams has a BSc Honours degree in Economics, Computing and Statistics from the University of Bath, United Kingdom and a Masters degree (with Distinction) in Business Administration. He is a Harvard Business School Alumni having attended the School's Executive General Management programme in 2003. In 2009, Cary made a career change, moving from the management of international businesses in the banking sector to become CEO of UICC based in Geneva, Switzerland.

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FIGHTING CANCER TOGETHER