Research Groups

Project Groups

Breast Cancer

President
PD Dr. med. Marcus Vetter
Cantonal Hospital Baselland, Liestal
Vice president
Prof. Dr. med. Peter Dubsky
Hirslanden Klinik St. Anna, Cham

Research Group Highlights or an Interesting Trial
We are pleased to present our annual report for 2023, which looks back on the past year and highlights the progress and achievements of SAKK breast cancer research. Marcus Vetter was elected as the new group president in June 2023. Peter Dubsky was subsequently elected vice president. Both are dedicated members of the SAKK network and are notable breast cancer researchers. Furthermore, three new members were appointed to the core team from various hospitals and specialist fields.

Project Group Trial Portfolio
Our trial portfolio currently comprises five open trials. The most successful clinical trials in 2023 were two surgical trials, the TAXIS trial (SAKK 23/16) and the Vision trial (SAKK 23/18), which attracted an impressive 141 and 57 patients respectively. The TAXIS trial involves a de-escalation of axillary surgery, while Vision-1 is investigating the value of biopsy and neoadjuvant chemotherapy to determine full pathological remission. Another success story is the REDUSE trial (SAKK 96/12), which is investigating optimum use of denosumab in metastatic breast and prostate cancer, and which will shortly reach its final reporting goal. The POLAR trial (IBCSG 59-19), which is being conducted in conjunction with IBCSG, recently experienced brisk recruitment of patients with recurrent localized breast cancer.

Our intergroup research activities are also proving to be successful. We have ongoing cooperations with IBCSG, BIG, SOLTI and Unicancer. There is also major interest from industry partners, and meetings to evaluate new proposals are constantly taking place.

Outlook
The outlook for 2024 is positive, with additional trials that are due to be activated soon. In addition, proposals are taking tangible form, some in cooperative form between the working groups and industry. The SAKK Young Oncology Academy was a great success for our group. Two new young researchers will help expand our trial portfolio and contribute new ideas to our group. This provides a source of major inspiration to us.

Developmental Therapeutics

President
Prof. Dr. med. Anastasios Stathis
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)
Vice presidents
Dr. med. Dr. rer. nat. Christian Britschgi
University Hospital Zurich
Dr. med. Martina Imbimbo
Lausanne University Hospital CHUV
Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Markus Jörger
Cantonal Hospital St. Gallen

Read the report on pages 14–15 of the Annual Portrait 2023.

Gastrointestinal Cancer

President
Dr. med. Alexander Siebenhüner
Clinic for Hematology & Oncology, Hirslanden Zurich
Vice president
PD Dr. med. Sara De Dosso
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)

A Challenging Year
2023 was a challenging year for the Project Group Gastrointestinal Cancer (PG GI). Despite the in-depth dialog that took place at core group meetings every four weeks and at official group meetings, we were unable to transform any ideas for trials into activities.

Nevertheless, PG GI actively developed and refined its strategies for the years ahead, and we would refer readers to the official account for more information.

The group undertook a critical assessment of trial proposals. For example, we were unable to open trials in collaboration with our valued partners at IKF and AIO because a negative majority decision (e.g. the PRESTO trial or AIO CAO ARO 18.2 study) resulted in the TIL trial in GI cancers with microsatellite instability not being opened. The reasons for this were communicated.

Trial participation at PG GI's sites is brisk owing to the results of development activities and the trials due to commence in 2024.

In brief, we undertook development of registry projects (pancreatic cancer registry) and phase II/III projects (NEOXY trial, Pemrec) and diagnostically driven trials such as CIRCULATE III in the project phase development. One of the biggest obstacles is securing budgets for the trials in question.

Two New Trial Projects Opened for 2024
After a long, two-year planning period, phase III of the DANTE trial investigating the perioperative setting of stomach cancer is now finally scheduled to open in Q1/Q2 2024. Among other things, the trial had experienced unexpected delays during opening (including delayed protocol feedback on the part of the lead sponsor and changes to trial documents required by the ethics committee). We are now extremely motivated to enroll patients into the clinically relevant multicenter trial project at our ten sites.

The second exciting clinical trial for 2024 will be the primary and acquired resistance to targeted treatment in BRAF-V600E-mutated metastatic colorectal cancer (PARTACER) trial for the further treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer.

Please see the separate report on page 22 of the Annual Portrait for a list of publications and abstracts for 2023.

I have no doubt that the resourceful and committed working group of the PG GI, supported by the core team and our external advisor Prof. Dr. med. Florian Lordick, can look confidently ahead to 2024 and beyond.

Gynecological Cancer

President
Prof. Dr. med. Intidhar Labidi-Galy
Geneva University Hospitals HUG
Vice presidents
Dr. med. Ilaria Colombo
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland IOSI
Dr. med. Ursula Hasler-Strub
Cantonal Hospital Graubünden

Autonomous Project Group With a New President
There were several changes in 2023. Firstly, our group became a project group. This important achievement underscores the strong support received from the SAKK Board, group members' commitment and determination to contribute new projects and trials to SAKK, and our close cooperation with the European Network for Gynaecological Oncological Trials (ENGOT).

Prof. Dr. med. Intidhar Labidi-Galy was appointed president and Dr. med. Ilaria Colombo and Dr. med. Ursula Hasler-Strub vice presidents of the group. The core team of president, vice presidents and three members (Dr. med. Benedetta Campana, Dr. med. Julian Wampfler and PD Dr. med. Franziska Siegertaler) meets once a month to define the group's strategy and discuss and elaborate on new ideas and cooperations.

First Swiss Registry for Ovarian Cancer
In Q4 2023, the group set up SAKK/SCORED_OvCaR, the Swiss registry for ovarian cancer. This registry has secured funding to enroll 500 ovarian cancer patients, including some with rare histologies. The ethics committee approved the registry and it is open for patient enrollment. It is the first Swiss registry for gynecological cancer and has the important goal of collecting real-world data to provide further support for clinical research into ovarian cancer within our group.

New Trials in Preparation
During 2023, we partnered with ENGOT to take part in the MK-2870-005/ENGOT-en23/MITO trial. This is a phase III, randomized, active-controlled, open-label, multicenter trial to compare the efficacy and safety of MK-2870 monotherapy versus treatment of physician's choice in participants with endometrial cancer who have received prior platinum-based chemotherapy and immunotherapy. Several sites are being opened in Switzerland, with the trial due to start in the first half of 2024.

The group is also working on the development of several new trial proposals: surgical intervention in endometrial cancer, ctDNA-guided treatment in locally advanced endometrial cancer and neoadjuvant strategy in locally advanced cervical cancer and realistic databases for early treatment of gynecological cancers.

The wide range of trials that have been initiated and the proposals currently at the development stage reflect the dynamism and dedication of the Project Group Gynecological Cancer.

Leukemia

President
Prof. Dr. med. Thomas Pabst
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)
Vice president
Dr. med. Corinne Widmer-Widler
University Hospital Basel

2023 was another demanding year for the Project Group Leukemia. The previous generation of protocols in our main areas of activity reached their planned recruitment goals, whereas the next generation was not yet ready for activation.

Progress in Trials
Most notably, the CLL-17 trial, for which recruitment has been impressive, achieved its final accrual at the end of 2022 with a robust Swiss participation despite the limited recruitment period. The plan is to submit the successor trial, CLL-18, to the authorities during 2024 and hopefully to activate it during the second half of the year. In addition to the use of BTK inhibitors, this trial will address the important issue of the timing of MRD assessments.

The HOVON 150 and 156 trials, with their personalized and curative approaches for young, fit AML patients, recruited steadily at the trial sites. Both trials address the need to improve first-line treatment of patients with IDH1 or IDH2 mutations (HOVON 150) or FLT3 mutations (HOVON 156). HOVON 156 and the IDH2 arm of HOVON 150 achieved their recruitment target, while the IDH1 arm of HOVON 150 remained the only open trial. Unfortunately, the dose confirmation cohort in

HOVON 501, which is investigating the addition of venetoclax to intensive therapy, experienced toxicity problems, which further delayed trial activation.

Remarkable progress was achieved in the trials for AML patients not scheduled for intensive treatment. The EVOLVE consortium (HOVON/SAKK-AMLSG-NCRI) defined the future trial framework in 2022: It is hoped that the first project, a combination of azacitidine/ivosidenib plus or minus venetoclax in AML patients with IDH1 mutations, will be activated by the end of 2024 (based on the positive outcome of the AGILE trial). A further interesting trial that is due to be activated in the second half of 2024 is the randomized use of the menin inhibitor revumenib combined with a backbone of azacitidine/venetoclax in AML with NMP1 mutation or MLL-rearranged AML.

Outlook

Organization of the ALL-SAKK/GRAALL follow-up trial (GRAALL 2022) made remarkable progress on the funding front. The group is optimistic that it will be possible to successfully activate the protocol during 2024.

Scientific output by the group remained stable and remarkable in 2023. At the organizational level, a new group chair will be elected in 2024 and a detailed timetable has been communicated to all group members.

Lung Cancer

President

Prof. Dr. med. Alessandra Curioni-Fontecedro
Cantonal Hospital Fribourg HFR

Vice presidents

Dr. med. Laetitia Mauti
Cantonal Hospital Winterthur
Prof. Dr. med. Alfredo Addeo
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Structure

In 2023, the group operated with a core team, in accordance with SAKK's new rules.

The core team met every two months. Two sites lost their voting rights in 2023.

Ongoing Trials

SAKK 16/18 has been recruiting patients with operable NSCLC to receive chemoradiotherapy and durvalumab followed by surgery and maintenance therapy with durvalumab. This trial is being led by Dr. med. Laetitia Mauti and data were presented at WCLC 2023 and ESTRO 2023.

Moreover, one manuscript was accepted for publication, presenting an analysis of patient data from the SAKK 16/XX and the D. König et al. trial published in *ESMO Open*, August 2023.

Participating sites recruited all patients for trial **SAKK 19/17** in metastatic NSCLC in 2022, and the data were presented at ELCC 2023. The manuscript was accepted for publication in 2024. **SAKK 17/18** for patients in next-line therapy completed recruitment in a very short time in 2021, and an analysis of the results for the NSCLC cohort was presented at ESMO 2023.

All patients for **SAKK 15/19** in SCLC with extensive disease have been recruited. This trial is investigating the role of radiotherapy consolidation after chemoimmunotherapy (with durvalumab) in extensive disease. Trial director Prof. Dr. med. Alfredo Addeo will review the data in 2024, and the plan is to submit an abstract at ESMO 2024.

Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Sacha Rothschild initiated cooperation with the Scandinavian trial group to recruit patients for the **ACHILES** trial in SCLC with limited disease. This trial aims to understand the role of atezolizumab consolidation in limited-stage SCLC. This trial is investigating a very important issue in this small patient population, and such international collaboration helped ensure the success of recruitment while emphasizing the need for trials for these patients. While all patients have been enrolled for this trial, the data are not yet ready for analysis.

Recruitment of patients from the mesothelioma cohort for the **SAKK 17/18** ORIGIN trial in mesothelioma was completed in 2022. This trial was developed to investigate a combination of gemcitabine and atezolizumab in pretreated patients who are not responding to standard treatment. The fast pace of recruitment for this trial demonstrates the tremendous need for new therapies in this area. The data are not yet ready for analysis.

Joint Trials in Thoracic Cancer

Several joint projects, for which ETOP is a major partner, are currently in progress.

The **CHESS** trial (Prof. Dr. med. Matthias Guckenberger, Prof. Dr. med. Isabelle Schmitt-Opitz, Prof. Dr. med. Alessandra Curioni-Fontecedro) is investigating oligometastatic NSCLC. All patients have been enrolled and are receiving chemotherapy, durvalumab and SBRT for all metastases, to be followed by local definite treatment (surgery or radiotherapy). The new protocol for CHESS 2 was approved in 2023 and this trial is now being modified for durvalumab in combination with tremelimumab.

Mesothelioma: The **BEAT-MESO** trial investigated the role of chemotherapy + bevacizumab ± atezolizumab in untreated patients. All patients were included in the trial.

The joint publications are also a reflection of the success of this cooperation.

A total of 63 patients were recruited to trials in 2023.

Outlook

Several trials have been developed for 2024:

- For first-line therapy in stage IV NSCLC: A trial investigating the use of magnesium in combination with standard therapy (Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. nat. Sacha Rothschild)
- For stage IV NSCLC: The salVage trial investigating the use of consolidative surgery or radiotherapy following systemic treatment
- For stage III NSCLC: A trial involving escalation of radiotherapy dose while sparing organs at risk.
- For first-line therapy of stage IV NSCLC in frail patients: A trial investigating the use of cemiplimab with or without dose-reduced chemotherapy
- In cooperation with ETOP: the ADOPT, ILEAS and RAISE trials

Lymphoma

President

Prof. Dr. med. Francesco Bertoni

Università della Svizzera italiana (USI)

Vice president

Prof. Dr. med. Thorsten Zenz

University Hospital Zurich

Research Group Highlights

Our group had 66 patients in 2023; 47 in the sole clinical and interventional trial that is currently open and 19 in the European Mantle Cell Lymphoma Network (EMCL). These figures are higher than in 2021 and 2022.

SAKK 38/19, for patients with diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL) patients, was conceived by project group investigators and is also open in Italy. It is an exploratory multicohort phase II trial that is investigating the addition of the second-generation BTK inhibitor acalabrutinib to standard-regimen R-CHOP in a subset of DLBCL patients with specific genetic lesions, as defined by liquid biopsy, and the inclusion of circulating tumor DNA with PET imaging in treatment decisions.

There are still no trials for patients with some of the most common hematologic cancers, such as Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma (MM) and follicular lymphoma (FL). In June 2023, however, we joined the international phase III academic trial MorningLyte. We will compare a combination of mosunetuzumab, a bispecific antibody that targets CD20 and CD3 and redirects T cells to attack and eliminate malignant B cells, and the immunomodulator lenalidomide with chemoimmunotherapy in previously untreated FL patients. The trial will open in Switzerland and other participating countries in summer 2024.

New Trials in the Pipeline

The project group also decided in 2023 to take part in new trials (phase I of a BTK degrader; phase I of a combination of two bispecific antibodies; phase II of immunomodulators following incomplete response to CAR T cells) that are scheduled to begin in 2024 in addition to the IELSG48 trial for untreated patients with splenic marginal zone lymphoma (approved by the project group in 2022) and the new SAKK 38/23 LIBERTY trial. This latter trial, directed by Noémie Lang, is the winner of the first SAKK Network Trial Award with prize money of CHF 1 million and will investigate the role of liquid biopsy to diagnose occult CNS involvement in high-risk B cell non-Hodgkin lymphoma patients.

Once again, the group achieved a high scientific output, with various publications in the Journal of Clinical Oncology, Blood, Lancet Haematology and eClinicalMedicine, as well as oral contributions and posters at the ASH, EHA and ICML congresses.

We are exploring new trials for patients with multiple myeloma, mantle cell lymphoma and Hodgkin lymphoma.

Urogenital Tumors

President
Dr. Ursula Vogl
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)
Vice president
Dr. med. Alexandros Papachristofilou
University Hospital Basel

Our group recruited 69 patients into three open studies during 2023. After a fall-off in project ideas in 2022, group meetings discussed several new trial proposals following consultations in the core team.

Project Group Trials
The highlights of 2023 include:

1. The reopening of SAKK 06/19, a trial investigating a combination of chemotherapy, immunotherapy and intravesical therapy in muscle-invasive bladder cancer.
2. Full enrollment into SAKK 01/18, a trial investigating de-escalated chemotherapy and radiotherapy in stage IIA/B seminoma and the biggest trial to date in this indication. Preparations are being made for an expansion cohort.
3. Continued recruitment for SAKK 96/12, an investigation of de-escalation of the bone-modifying agent denosumab in metastatic prostate and breast cancer.
4. The firmly established SAKK Translational Urogenital Cancer Network Meeting in fall 2023 and the SAKK GU Cancer Forum.

New Research Strategy
After conducting a survey of members and extensive discussions, the group also formulated its research strategy for the years ahead.

The group is now looking forward to opening new trials in 2024 and to restoring a diverse portfolio.

Working Groups

Imaging in Diagnostic and Therapy Monitoring

President
PD Dr. med. Andreas Hötker
Onkozentrum Zurich
Vice president
Prof. Dr. med. Lukas Ebner
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)

Drafting a Consensus Paper

The group's task is to highlight the key role of imaging in cancer diagnosis and therapy monitoring. The focal task of 2023 was drafting a consensus paper on the standardization of imaging protocols in the radiology departments of university hospitals in a bid to improve the consistency, reliability and comparability of trials. To ensure the work was suitably structured, the group began drafting imaging guidelines for lung cancer.

Standardizing Imaging Protocols

The Working Group Imaging in Diagnostic and Therapy Monitoring is a cross-trial working group within SAKK. Specialists in radiology and nuclear medicine from various Swiss medical centers contribute their expertise and help assess image-based endpoints for all SAKK trials involving imaging. The focal task of 2023 was drafting a consensus paper on the standardization of imaging protocols in the radiology departments of university hospitals in a bid to improve the consistency, reliability and comparability of trials.

This joint process involved a broad spectrum of experts and included meetings and consultations with radiology specialists and other disciplines from all university hospitals.

The result will reflect the group's collaborative approach and aim to provide nationwide standardized guidelines and evaluations for imaging that will improve the compatibility and interpretability of the data. The goal is to present this white paper to SAKK during 2024 and to publish the consensus by the end of the year.

It is our opinion that a general imaging guideline for scientific studies will simplify the implementation of imaging in trial protocols and provide information on the correct use of imaging in a specific research issue.

The Working Group Imaging in Diagnostic and Therapy Monitoring will of course continue to assist all members in determining imaging-related endpoints as needed.

Thanks

We would like to thank everyone, including radiologists, researchers and institutions, for their dedication and expertise during the drafting of the consensus document and white paper. The contributions from specialists throughout Switzerland have shown that there is a lot of interest in standardizing investigation methods. Using the imaging guideline for lung cancer as a starting point, future projects will progressively address other organ systems too.

Head and Neck Cancer

President
Dr. med. Vittoria Espeli
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)
Vice president
PD Dr. med. Panagiotis Balermpas
University of Zurich and University Hospital Zurich

During 2023, the Working Group Head and Neck Cancer used all members' specialist knowledge to maximum effect, in particular by setting up an active core team that meets regularly and in which all important disciplines are represented. Furthermore, we established the role of external consultant with international expertise. More about this later.

Comprehensive Disease Area Strategy

One of the major highlights of the year was the completion of a comprehensive disease area strategy that addresses all stages of head and neck cancer and takes account of unmet needs as well as the group's research interests. As a result, protocols for three interdisciplinary trials are currently being completed:

1) PROLoNg: an international, intergroup, randomized phase III trial in cooperation with EORTC, investigating the benefits of local stereotactic ablative radiotherapy as an adjunct to standard treatment with pembrolizumab in oligometastatic patients with one to five lesions. The trial was also supported and approved by SAKK's Section Radio-Oncology.

2) Systemic treatment sequencing in locally recurrent head and neck cancer: The primary goal is to evaluate the role of sequential treatment (chemotherapy → immunotherapy) compared to the standard approach of simultaneous chemoimmunotherapy (randomized phase II–III trial).

3) Systemic treatment with or without local treatment of the primary tumor in patients with head and neck cancer with distant metastases: The primary goal is to investigate whether a combination of standard systemic palliative treatment and aggressive local treatment improves survival and quality of life in patients with multiple distant metastases (randomized phase II–III trial). SAKK's Section Radio-Oncology voted in favor of and approved the trial.

Extensive discussions with various pharmaceutical industry partners are currently being held in close consultation with SAKK's scientific officers to obtain funding for protocols 2) and 3).

Strengthening Cooperation

Constructive cooperation within specialist areas and the identification of further unmet needs under the disease area strategy resulted in the development of two further interdisciplinary proposals that are currently under preparation:

1) Surgical trial for opening in Switzerland: Neurotized profunda artery perforator (PAP) flap for subtotal and total tongue reconstruction in squamous cell carcinoma of the tongue (phase I–II feasibility study)

2) Cooperation with the Working Group Supportive, Palliative and Geriatric Oncology (WG SPG): Impact of palliative medicine on the aggressiveness of end-of-life care in patients with recurrent/metastatic head and neck cancer (prospective observational trial).

To improve cooperation, raise the group's profile, improve recruitment into major phase III trials and simplify access to international trials, we have applied to become an active member of the Head and Neck Collaborative Group.

Although this type of cancer is challenging, we do not doubt the working group's commitment or the support provided by our internationally renowned external advisor Prof. Dr. med. Jan Vermorken.

Melanoma

President
Dr. med. Joanna Mangana
University Hospital Zurich
Vice president
Dr. med. Ioannis Metaxas
Spital Thurgau AG

There have been major successes in melanoma in recent years, and several therapies have been approved. That makes initiating national phase I–II trials a challenge. Dr. med. Joanna Mangana and Dr. med. Ioannis Metaxas were re-elected president and vice president respectively.

Ongoing Trials

ENiGMA, an open label, non-randomized, phase IB trial to characterize the safety, tolerability and recommended dose of tinostamustine (EDOS101), a first-in-class alkylating histone deacetylase inhibition (HDACi) fusion molecule, in combination with nivolumab in patients with refractory, locally advanced or metastatic melanoma, completed recruitment during 2023 and was presented at ESMO 2023. A total of 17 patients was included, most of whom had previously received treatment. The combination displayed a DCR of 69% (46% SD and 23% PR) and an mPFS of 8.3 weeks.

SAKK 66/17: Thermal laser ablation and intratumoral injection of IP-001 in patients with advanced solid tumors is recruiting very well in soft tissue tumors. However, recruitment of melanoma patients is challenging. The trial is still open; the majority of patients included had poor prognostic factors or non-cutaneous (uveal) melanoma. Bern opened as an additional site alongside Chur and St. Gallen.

Analysis of CTLA-4 single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) as possible surrogate markers for the success of ipilimumab-containing regimes in melanoma: The project was accepted for publication in the *Journal of Immunotherapy*.

Trial Projects Discussed

Several proposals were discussed last year: Immunochemotherapy combinations in the first-line setting in patients with high LDH values, MelChrono on optimal timing of immunotherapy and FEMEL on female fertility during immunotherapy. Unfortunately, funding has not yet been secured, so the proposals have yet to progress to the next phase.

The group was able to enroll 90 patients into the SCORED registry (SAKK 80/19 AlpineTIR).

Outlook
Switzerland's melanoma guidelines will be updated during 2024.

Sarcoma

President
PD Dr. med. Attila Kollàr
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)

The Working Group Sarcoma enjoyed brisk trial activity during 2023.

Under the direction of Dr. med. Emanuel Stutz (Young Investigator, Radio-Oncology, Inselspital Bern—University Hospital of Bern) the foundations were laid for the initiation of the TNT-HYPE trial "Feasibility of Total Neoadjuvant Treatment with HYPErthermia in high risk extremity and trunk soft tissue sarcoma: A multicenter, single-arm phase II trial". This prospective trial will investigate the feasibility, potential benefits and tolerability of hyperthermia as a radiosensitizer in combination with a standard neoadjuvant chemotherapy in high-risk soft tissue sarcoma. This highly interdisciplinary trial comprises successful and highly constructive cooperation firstly between different medical disciplines and secondly between SAKK and the Swiss Hyperthermia Network. Thanks to the nationwide interest, it has been possible to secure partial funding by SAKK. Several grant applications, including one to the Swiss National Science Foundation, have been submitted and are being evaluated. There is major hope on all sides that it will once again be possible to initiate a national sarcoma trial that could have the potential to influence and change current treatment practice worldwide.

Collaboration in the International Research Environment
Following close cooperation between SAKK and the Swiss Paediatric Oncology Group (SPOG), under SPOG's lead, the Working Group Sarcoma successfully facilitated participation in the INTER-EWING-1 trial. This is a prospective randomized phase III trial under the direction of Prof. Bernadette Brennan (UK) that will be investigating several important issues relating to optimum treatment of Ewing sarcoma patients, including in particular maintenance drug therapy. The trial will be submitted to ethics committees and Swissmedic in mid-2024. Swiss sarcoma sites' participation in this important international trial is testimony to our motivation and ability to contribute successfully to the international research environment.

Visibility Thanks to SAKK 57/16
The successful publication of the results of SAKK 57/16 (NAPAGE)[1] deserve mention. The trial shows that palliative chemotherapy in the form of nab-paclitaxel and gemcitabine is an active combination therapy for previously treated soft tissue sarcoma. Our working group's international visibility represents a major target for us going forward.

[1] European Journal of Cancer 197 (2024) 113470

Supportive, Palliative and Geriatric Oncology

President
Prof. Dr. med. David Blum
University Hospital Zurich
Vice president
Dr. med. Vérène Dougoud
Cantonal Hospital Fribourg HFR

New Members, Longer Name and Important Survey
2023 was a successful year for our working group. Two meetings were held at the Semi-Annual Meeting, and new members were welcomed at each. The highlight of the year was the expansion of the group—and extension of its name—into SAKK Working Group Supportive, Palliative and Geriatric Oncology in combination with the election of Dr. med. Vérène Dougoud as vice president. She, Marcus Vetter and others started work straight away on the Swiss landscape in geriatric oncology survey, which aims to record geriatric oncology practice and requirements in Switzerland. The survey is to be launched by SAKK.

Studies of decision-making in phase I trials (PD Dr. phil. Annina Seiler) and trial participation (PD Dr. Sandro Stoffel) were progressed. One study of advanced care planning is currently in progress in French-speaking Switzerland and a second is starting in Bern. The possibility of opening additional SAKK sites will be explored in the course of these. Trials involving objective prognosis assessment at the start of cancer treatment and a trial of anamorelin in multimodal cachexia management are either waiting for partners or funding commitments.

Interaction with other groups (Lung Cancer, Head and Neck Cancer, Radio-Oncology, Developmental Therapeutics) was stepped up and cooperation with representatives of the patient group is being superseded by increasingly more important issues such as patient and public involvement. With the increase in the group's activity and its expansion, it was decided to hold in-between meetings in 2024.

Cellular Therapies

President
Prof. Dr. med. Dr. phil. George Coukos
Lausanne University Hospital CHUV
Vice presidents
PD Dr. med. Dr. Francesco Ceppi
Lausanne University Hospital CHUV
PD Dr. med. Michael Daskalakis
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)
Prof. Dr. med. Heinz Läubli
University Hospital Basel
Prof. Dr. med. Dominik Schneidawind
University Hospital Zurich

SAKK's Working Group Cellular Therapies (WG CEL) was founded in Zurich in 2019.

Intensifying Cooperation
During 2023, activities by SAKK's Working Group Cellular Therapies (WG CEL) continued by holding regular core team meetings and undertaking efforts to expand the group's network of clinicians and researchers who are committed to progressing cell therapies. Cooperation networks are undoubtedly extremely important in progressing WG CEL's projects and trials, particularly considering the major obstacles Swiss patients face when trying to access cell therapies. The lack of any clear rules on who pays the cost of hospital stays for patients receiving novel cell therapies is particularly concerning. This issue prompted the group to step up cooperation with other members of Swiss university hospitals in an attempt to find practicable solutions. Efforts were made within the SAKK network to harmonize local cell therapy initiatives and to create national referral protocols.

Access to Innovative Treatments
Furthermore, a workshop with industry and biotech partners was held during the SAKK Semi-Annual Meeting in November to pave the way for new clinical trials that will benefit patients in Switzerland. The workshop focused on exploring strategies that give patients early access to innovative cancer therapies, identifying potential ways of rationalizing the complexity that exists within the research and development ecosystem for cancer cell therapies, simplifying cooperation with the key players in cellular cancer treatments in Switzerland, and promoting and supporting biotech research in Switzerland. The workshop concluded with an open round table discussion on how to make innovative cancer therapies available to patients at an early stage.

CNS Tumors

President
Prof. Dr. med. Philippe Schucht
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)
Vice president
PD Dr. med. Dr. phil. Emilie Le Rhun
University Hospital Zurich

The Working Group Central Nervous System Tumors (CNS Tumors) currently has 68 members. It maintains synergistic relations with the Swiss Neuro-Oncology Society.

CNS Group—Trial Highlights
In 2023, working group members once again conducted several clinical trials.

Trials Involving Primary Brain Tumors
The multicenter RESDEX trial is investigating the impact of perioperative steroids on patient care, complications and clinical outcome. The trial currently has three Swiss sites (Bern, Basel and St. Gallen) and has recruited 30 of the target 50 patients. The trial is scheduled to conclude in 2026.

The multicenter, randomized, controlled RESURGE trial is investigating surgical treatment of recurrent glioblastoma. The primary endpoint is overall survival. This trial is partly funded by EORTC. It is being conducted at 25 Swiss and European sites, and additional sites in France will be added during 2024. At present, 39 out of 120 patients have been recruited for the randomized part of the trial. A maximum of 55 patients will be included in the observation group.

GLIOSTAR: The GLIOSTAR trial aims to investigate the safety and efficacy of L19TNF plus lomustine in patients with glioblastoma in the first stage of progression. The primary endpoint is overall survival. The randomized part of phase II was activated. Patients are randomized at a ratio of 1:1 and receive either lomustine and L19TNF or lomustine on its own. Nine out of 118 patients have been enrolled. Site activation is still ongoing.

GLUGLIO: The primary goal of the randomized 1:1 trial of glutamate signaling inhibitors in glioblastoma is to explore the efficacy of a combination of gabapentin, sulfasalazine, memantine and standard chemoradiotherapy versus standard chemoradiotherapy alone in patients with newly diagnosed glioblastoma. The primary endpoint is PFS-6. The trial is aiming to enroll 120 patients. 74 have been included.

LEGATO: Lomustine with and without reirradiation for first progression of glioblastoma: a randomized phase III trial. The primary goal is to demonstrate whether reirradiation combined with lomustine is beneficial to survival when compared with lomustine alone in patients with initial progression of their glioblastoma. This EORTC trial is funded by an EU subsidy that does not extend to Switzerland's participation. We are currently trying to find a way of enabling Switzerland to take part in this important initiative.

Trials Involving Metastatic CNS Cancer

IT-IO: Intrathecal administration of anti-PD1/anti-CTLA-4 in combination with a systemic combination of anti-PD1/anti-CTLA-4 in patients with NSCLC or melanoma and recently diagnosed leptomeningeal metastases: a multicenter phase I trial This Swiss trial sets out to determine the recommended phase II dose of intrathecal nivolumab and ipilimumab. It aims to enroll 15–26 patients. The expansion phase is open.

STRIKE: Immunotherapy or targeted therapy with or without stereotactic radiosurgery for patients with brain metastases from melanoma or non-small cell lung cancer is a prospective, multicenter, randomized (1:1) open-label phase III superiority trial. The aim of this international trial is to assess the additional benefits of SRS in advance of systemic standard therapy in newly diagnosed brain metastases. The trial is aiming to enroll 190 patients. As yet 12 patients have been included. Site activation is still ongoing.

EViDENCE: The EViDENCE-BM trial is partly funded by the Belgian Foundation Against Cancer. Its primary goal is to collect data to demonstrate superiority in terms of overall survival of an arm managed by pharmacoscopy compared with an arm that is not managed by pharmacoscopy (2). The trial is aiming to enroll 102 patients. Activation is scheduled for Q3 2024.

Outlook

Our working group emphatically supports the application by team member Denis Migliorini from Geneva University Hospitals to hold EANO 2026 in Geneva. Although the network is very active, our trials are conducted outside SAKK. We are working to further strengthen neuro-oncology within SAKK.

Sections

Network for Outcomes Research

President
PD Dr. med. Cédric Panje
Hirslanden Radiotherapy
Vice president
Prof. Dr. med. Thomas D. Szucs
Klinik Hirslanden

In addition to selected SAKK trials and literature-based modeling, the Network for Outcomes Research focuses heavily on health economic analyses.

Several health economic analyses using literature-based modeling are currently in progress. These are investigating the cost and impact of olaparib in BRCA1/2 germline-mutated pancreatic cancer, the cost efficiency of BRCA mutation testing in breast cancer and the cost efficiency of adjuvant radiotherapy in ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS).

In addition to the health economic aspects, our section is also supporting research into patient reports of results, such as the recently initiated study "Assessing medical professionals and cancer patients' preferences for quality of life (QoL) and length of life (LoL) in oncology: a study on gastric and esophageal cancer".

Ongoing SAKK Trials

The Network for Outcomes Research is currently involved in two ongoing clinical SAKK trials:

In a health economic project work stream of SAKK 96/12 (prevention of symptomatic skeletal events with denosumab administered every four weeks versus every 12 weeks), inpatient and outpatient costs are collected from hospitals using specific resource use forms and quality-adjusted life years are estimated within the trial using EQ-5D forms. The trial was reopened in 2021 and recruitment will end in 2024. It is planned to apply for a subsidy to fund health economic analysis of the collected data in 2024.

Furthermore, accrual for the cost analysis in SAKK 80/19, the AlpineTIR immunotherapy registry, was completed. Health economic analysis is planned for 2024/25 and will focus on direct drug costs.

Network for Cancer Predisposition Testing and Counseling

President
Dr. med. Manuela Rabaglio-Poretti
Inselspital Bern (University Hospital of Bern)
Vice president
Dr. med. Rossella Graffeo
Oncology Institute of Southern Switzerland (IOSI)

New Leadership and Efficient Structures

There was a change in group leadership at the start of the year. Dr. med. Manuela Rabaglio became group chair, while Dr. med. Rossella Graffeo was elected vice president. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Dr. med. Sheila Unger and Dr. med. Salome Riniker for their many years of committed work on behalf of CPTC. We are delighted that they will continue to support us with many tasks.

A core group that is representative of the group's heterogeneity was formed. Its members include two medical geneticists (Dr. med. Benno Röthlisberger and Dr. med. Fulvia Brugnoletto), one medical oncologist (Dr. med. Susanna Stoll) and two gynecologists (Prof. Dr. med. Cornelia Leo and Dr. med. Christine Strub).

Strategy 2023

At its first meeting, the core team developed a new strategy, with various focal points, for 2023. In particular, revision of Art. 12b let. e of HIBO governing risk-reducing surgery and the revision of the List of Analyses to challenge the test indication for the therapeutic indication were successfully carried out.

The monthly case discussions and quarterly journal clubs were rolled out after a pilot phase and are credited to participants as training. The genetic journal club focuses primarily on articles of a challenging nature, and invites national and international authors to present their work.

More Training Courses

Our training course in St. Gallen was a success and we held our first course in Ticino, with outstanding international speakers, under the auspices of ESO. Looking ahead, we are planning to augment the spring course in St. Gallen with courses to be held alternately in Lausanne and Lugano in the fall.

Given the growing number of members in counseling roles and the growing complexity of counseling, training courses will be offered in the future.

Furthermore, SAKK will sponsor local genetic workshops focusing on a particular oncogenetic issue for the purpose of improving and increasing training in the region.

Revision of the Swiss counseling and testing guideline and the counseling guideline is in progress, with implementation scheduled for mid-2024.

It is planned to include a presentation on a particular current topic in oncogenetics, to be given by national and/or international speakers, at the biennial meeting of SAKK CPTC.

Registries

President
PD Dr. med. Ulf Petrausch
Onkozentrum Zurich
Vice president
Dr. med. Petros Tsantoulis
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Embedded in Switzerland's Data Ecosystem

SAKK's Section Registries is embedded in an increasingly busy data ecosystem within Switzerland. DigiSanté is the program set up by the FDHA to promote digital transformation in the healthcare sector. Having been mandated by the Federal Council, it is being drawn up by the Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) and the Federal Statistical Office (FSO) during an initial phase lasting until the end of 2024. It will then be implemented by the end of 2034.

The Swiss Personalized Health Network (SPHN) was founded in 2016 for the purpose of promoting personalized healthcare and health in Switzerland and to facilitate health data sharing. Swiss Personalized Oncology (SPO) is an SPHN driver project that focuses on standardizing cancer data so that they can be accessed for and exchanged in cancer-related projects. SPHN is currently focusing on the five university hospitals in Switzerland and is planning to expand into a nationwide project.

Thanks to the active work of the SAKK Competence Center (SAKK CC) and section members, SAKK is now an additional data supplier and has a technical interface to SPO known as the connector. The first data were successfully shared in December 2023, and SAKK investigators are now able to run trial data queries for the whole of Switzerland. To ensure the technical feasibility of queries, the section's managers and SAKK CC ensured the variables and syntax in the data collected by SAKK were aligned with SPHN from the outset.

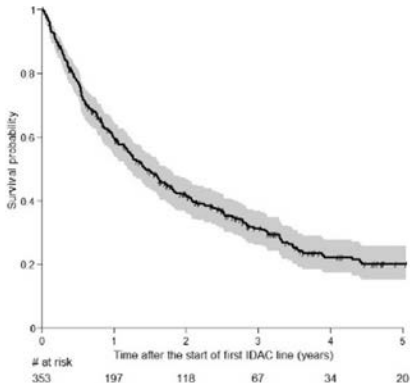
Criteria List Developed

The primary goal of the Section Registries when it was founded in 2021 was to develop a central platform to analyze medical data from the SAKK network. In pursuit of this goal, criteria were developed that allow the Scientific Committee to evaluate and assess data-based projects. Furthermore, a multistage call process for data-based projects was developed (Figure 1).

Benefit / SAKK Competence Center services	SAKK "label" 13-93 kCHF	SAKK is sponsor 179-450 kCHF	SAKK Registry 300-600 kCHF
Full extent of Core Data Set (CDS)			✓
Follow-up of 3 years for 95% patients			✓
Regular tailor-made reports (aggregated data)			✓
General Project Management & documents		✓	✓
Legal, Regulatory, QA		✓	✓
Data management and cleaning	(✓)	✓	✓
Statistical analysis	(✓)	✓	✓
Support in publications	(✓)	✓	✓
Use of CDS entities & semantics	✓	✓	✓
eCRF development, database maintenance	✓	✓	✓
PISIC & translations	✓	✓	✓

Fees to treatment centers and CC-external costs not included.
***SAKK consulting services** may comprise any of the elements of observational studies shown here*

Ongoing analysis of the AlpineTIR registry for patients with metastatic NSCLC produced results comparable to published studies. This supports the development of high-quality registries as a source of clinical evidence (Figure 2).



We are also currently managing a registry for EGFR mutations in NSCLC (LuCa). This retrospective and prospective registry for patients with metastatic NSCLC who exhibit typical and atypical EGFR mutations was activated on June 22, 2023 and comprised 40 patients in 2023. Two new projects were proposed, of which one (resectable pancreatic cancer) was approved by the scientific committee.

Outlook

The challenges facing us include persuading ethics committees of the value of registry projects and dealing with data protection and data security concerns. These challenges have been addressed by means of an external evaluation of the section. This will lead to a number of interesting and innovative changes during 2024.

Pathology

President
Dr. med. Anne-Laure Rougement Pidoux
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

The Section Pathology can provide expertise in tissue selection and validation, morphological characterization and molecular analysis.

The section demonstrates its ability to conduct high-quality accredited analyses and interpret the results achieved in its role as a partner to clinical and translational studies. The section addresses quality assurance issues, particularly pre-analytical and analytical tissue quality, tumor content, etc., and compliance with analytical standards.
Translational studies need advance planning and the Section Pathology's role is to provide a central resource for reviewing the quality and quantity of pathology samples.

The translational research projects led by Pathology are also initiated in collaboration with SAKK project and working groups.

The issue of archiving residual material after trial completion and biobanking issues are being specifically addressed.

Radio-Oncology

President
Prof. Dr. med. Nicolaus Andratschke
University Hospital Zurich
Vice president
Prof. Dr. Pelagia Tsoutsou
Geneva University Hospitals (HUG)

Vice President and Core Team Appointed

The proposal on the introduction and structure of the core team and the appointment of a group vice president was approved at the spring meeting. It was decided to expand the core team from four to six group members in addition to the president and vice president. Four members of the core team—Dr. Alexandros Papachristofilou, PD. Dr. Tobias Finazzi, Prof. Dr. Panagiotis Balermpas and Dr. Letizia Deantonio—had already been appointed.

Following an open call for nominations for the positions of vice president and two core team members, applications were collected and the position holders elected at the fall Semi-Annual Meeting. Prof. Pelagia Tsoutsou, Head of the Radio-Oncology department in Geneva, was elected vice president. Group members PD Dr. Robert Förster of Cantonal Hospital Winterthur and Dr. André Durham of Geneva University Hospitals HUG were also elected to complete the core team.

Active trials with successful recruitment

Dr. Alexandros Papachristofilou (University Hospital Basel) is the principal investigator of the recently published seminoma trial SAKK 01/10 and follow-up trial SAKK 01/18, which is investigating dose-reduced chemotherapy and radiotherapy in stage IIA/B seminoma. Since this trial has successfully completed recruitment quicker than expected, recruitment of an additional 35 patients was approved.

Trial SAKK 16/18 is investigating the immunomodulatory effect of stereotactic radiotherapy directed solely at the primary tumor in locally advanced, resectable stage III (N2) non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) in addition to neoadjuvant chemoimmunotherapy. We are pleased to report that accrual has picked up again and is currently running to schedule. The patient fee was increased from 30% to 40%. An abstract from the trial has been submitted and was presented at WCLC 2023.

As EORTC Co-PI, Prof. Nicolaus Andratschke presented an update on the EORTC 1702 HALT trial, which was originally an SAKK collaborative trial. The trial had completed recruitment by mid-2023 and initial results from the last follow-up period and the corresponding number of incidents will be presented again in Q3 2024.

New and Upcoming Trials and Concepts in Discussion

Prof. Thomas Zilli reported on the development of the STAMPEDE2 trial, the successor to the STAMPEDE trial that now provides a test template for stereotactic ablative radiotherapy in patients with M1 prostate cancer. Recruitment will commence in the UK in 2024. Switzerland will only be able to participate if we are successful in sourcing funding.

Prof. Panagiotis Balermpas (University Hospital Zurich) has successfully established the collaborative trial EORTC 2014 HNCG PROLoNg: pembrolizumab and radiotherapy for oligometastatic squamous cell carcinoma of the head and neck, a randomized phase III trial. Once funding and SAKK support has been secured, the trial will be initiated and launched. It will have eight sites in Switzerland.

Prof. Nicolaus Andratschke (University Hospital Zurich) is one of the coordinators of the EORTC/ESTRO E2 Radiate ReCare cohort, a prospective observational registry on patients receiving a second course of high-dose irradiation in a previously treated area. As yet, EORTC only intends to recruit at three Swiss sites, so this would be an opportunity for SAKK to support the participation in this cohort of additional high-recruiting sites with a relevant number of re-irradiated patients. Furthermore, dedicated Swiss participation would make it easier to increase the patient cohort by n=250 patients, for example, and specifically open to new anatomical sites, such as the brain or the head and neck.

PD Dr. Tobias Finazzi also developed a trial concept in collaboration with the Lung Cancer Group on optimized radiotherapy for CRT+I/O in non-resectable stage III NSCLC. The trial is currently in development and it is uncertain whether funding can be obtained from the pharmaceutical industry. Initial contact has been established with patient representatives and the trial is scheduled for submission in Q1/2 2024.