

comunicato stampa

## **SPORT THERAPY RESEARCHERS FROM ALL OVER EUROPE AT THE VERGA CENTRE INVOLVED IN AN INCLUSIVE ORIENTEERING COMPETITION**

***Gathered at the Maria Letizia Verga Centre are researchers from the 16 European institutions involved in the FORTEe\* - Get strong to fight childhood cancer research project, a protocol for evaluating the impact of sport and precision exercise in the treatment of children and young people with oncological diseases***

***The researchers will be engaged in an inclusive orienteering challenge in Monza Park: guiding their route will be children in the centres involved in FORTEe.***

**Monza, 28 February 2024** - Fifty researchers from the FORTEe\* project, an international multicentre scientific research project are meeting today, until 1 March, at the Maria Letizia Verga Centre - MBBM Foundation for their fourth General Assembly. They represent the sixteen institutions from the eight European countries (Spain, Italy, Germany, England, France, Romania, Slovenia and Denmark) that, coordinated by the J. Gutenberg University of Mainz, are part of the research consortium that is scientifically evaluating the impact of sport and precision exercise in the therapeutic pathway of children and young people suffering from oncological pathologies.

*"The Verga Centre is the leader, within the FORTEe project, of the line of work dedicated to clinical trials, under the guidance of Professor Adriana Balduzzi, head of the bone marrow transplant centre. A relevant role that reflects both our history of excellence in the treatment of young people with leukaemia, lymphoma and other non-oncological blood diseases and the pioneering experience of the Sport Therapy project, already active in Monza since 2017, thanks to the support of the Verga Committee. A synergy that has succeeded over time in giving continuity to a scientific project of great support for the quality of life of young people,"* explains Professor Andrea Biondi, director of the Paediatric Clinic and the Maria Letizia Verga Centre in Monza

The definition of the evaluation protocols and training programmes were the first scientific product of the FORTEe project, which started in 2021 within the framework of the Horizon 2020 programme. The aim is to demonstrate with solid evidence that exercise and sport are a safe and potentially effective therapy to counteract fatigue, maintain strength, aerobic capacity, coordination and agility in children and adolescents, as well as to counteract disease and cancer therapy-related problems.

*"The entire group of sports physicians, motor scientists and exercise professionals at the Verga Centre who work daily with our young patients took part in this project with great motivation and seriousness. We are honoured to be able to host, also in collaboration with our oncologist colleague Filippo Spreafico from the Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori in Milan, (the other Italian centre that is part of the consortium for the solid tumour part of the trial) our European colleagues who are evaluating and training patients with equal commitment. The protocols are currently in use in 10 centres in addition to Monza and Milan (Madrid, Lyon, Ljubljana, Essen, Mainz, Heildeberg, Oxford and Copenhagen) and to date more than 300 children and adolescents have been involved, which will rise to 450 at the end of the trial. Once the protocols have been validated by the scientific community, they will be made available to centres all over the world,"* explains Francesca Lanfranconi, sports physician and researcher in human physiology at the Maria Letizia Verga Centre, responsible for the sports implementation of the research in Monza and the Sport Therapy project.

In conjunction with the assembly, the Maria Letizia Verga Committee, in collaboration with the PuntoNord sports association and the Livelox company, is organising an inclusive orienteering event. It is an orienteering competition in Monza Park, but with a formula designed to have the children and adolescents in hospital as the absolute protagonists, making them active participants in the competition.

In fact, the children hospitalised in the sixteen institutions of the FORTEe project represent 'the mind' of the competition: an interactive map allows them to guide their 'legs', or rather their team, in the search for the flags set up along the route. Through the Livelox app, as in a map of Harry Potter's wizard, the youngsters will be able to see their "legs" moving through Monza Park in real time: to make themselves available as "legs", in addition to the FORTEe project researchers, also PuntoNord volunteers and sportsmen.

#### **Comitato Maria Letizia Verga**

Founded in 1979 by Giovanni Verga, the father of Maria Letizia who died of leukaemia when she was only four years old, today it is an association that brings together parents, volunteers, friends, supporters, researchers, doctors and health workers involved in the fight against childhood leukaemia. It has more than 20,000 supporters and today can count on more than 250 volunteers. In over 40 years, the Committee has carried out countless activities aimed at the study and treatment of childhood leukaemia, which have enabled it to assist and heal over 2,000 children and adolescents, making a decisive contribution to increasing the cure rate of children and young people diagnosed with leukaemia (85% to date against 30% in 1979). The Committee was the initiator of the establishment of the Tettamanti Foundation and the research centre of the same name, the MBBM Foundation, as well as financing the construction of the Maria Letizia Verga Centre.

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#### **Relazioni con i media**

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