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MAJOR EUROPEAN MEDICAL SOCIETIES FORM ALLIANCE TO IMPROVE STAGNANT RESEARCH FUNDING, AND PREVENT EU RESEARCH BEING LEFT BEHIND BY CHINA

New Alliance wants to prevent stifling of European innovation and competitiveness

In a recent Brussels meeting, Dr Ruxandra Draghia-Akli, Director of the Health Directorate at Research Directorate-General of the European Commission, expressed deep concern about current EU funding earmarked for health projects. In response, major health-related societies across Europe have created an alliance to improve funding of biomedical research across the EU.

The Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe (AIBRE) aims to ensure that the European Parliament and member states increase vital funding for biomedical research up to a level that will allow European researchers to compete with the explosion of research spending in China, as well as the already much higher funding in the USA. The call from the Alliance comes as national research budgets, including University funding, are slashed across the EU, further increasing the pressure on European researchers and institutions.

Today, advocacy for European biomedical research is ineffective due a fragmented and uncoordinated approach. The Alliance aims to change all that, by giving a single, powerful voice to the biomedical research community across Europe that will maximise its impact on research budgets, covering all health disciplines, for improved health and wellbeing of all European citizens.

As a percentage of GDP, the EU spends just 1.8% on all Research and Development (R&D), compared with 2.7% in the USA, and 3.4% in Japan. Worse, data recently released by UNESCO showed that between 2002 and 2007 European investment in research has stagnated: actual spending on all R&D increased by just 29%, a figure shamefully similar to the 27% increase in GDP across the region.

Meanwhile, China has increased R&D spending by a staggering 160% across the same period, while its GDP increased by 97%. This is a massive increase in real terms, and China's commitment to accelerate research spending—together with a likely doubling of GDP—will see a near-quadrupling of its R & D budget by 2020.

“This a challenge that Europe must rise to, or we will no longer be a major world power in biomedical research,” said Professor Ulf Smith, Inaugural President of the Alliance and current President of EASD. “The EU committed in Lisbon (2000) and again in Barcelona (2002) to increase R&D spending towards 3% of GDP by 2010, but we are still languishing on 1.8%. So I ask the European Parliament and all its member states: where is this money? If we don't start increasing spending, we will be left behind by China, with a major negative effect on the economies, research communities and health of every country in Europe.”

The Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe will initially comprise the four founding societies: the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD); European Respiratory Society (ERS); European Society of Cardiology (ESC); and European Cancer Organisation (ECCO). The first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Alliance—in Brussels,

December 9—was attended by a further 28 societies or federations across Europe, covering an estimated 400,000 European researchers. Each of these organisations sent high-level representatives to the AGM and will seek support from their membership to join the Alliance early in 2011.

Currently around 85% of funding specifically for health-related research in EU countries comes from member states' own budgets, with 15% coming from the EU itself. The Alliance will take a proactive stance, communicating effectively with the EU at all appropriate levels including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of Ministers. "By working together in this Alliance, we in the European biomedical research community can better work towards our aim of remaining at the heart of health-related research and innovation worldwide," concludes Professor Smith. "But our efforts must be matched—very soon—by concrete action by both the European Parliament and individual member states to increase their research budgets. Otherwise Europe will continue to stagnate, stifling innovation and competitiveness while compromising the health and quality of life of our fellow citizens."

For more information, please contact Professor Ulf Smith, inaugural President of the Alliance and President of EASD: e-mail: secretariat@easd.org / ulf.smith@medic.gu.se

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Or please visit the Alliance website, www.biomedeuropa.org

Editors notes:

As stated above, the four founding members are EASD, ESC, ERS, ECCO.

The 28 other societies/federations/bodies represented at first AGM of The Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe. Brussels, December 9 are:

European Society of Anaesthesiology (ESA); European Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ESCRS), European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI); European Society of Gynaecology (ESG), European Society of Hypertension (ESH), European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology (ESHRE); European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO); European Stroke Organisation (ESO); European Society of Pathology (ESP); European Society of Paediatric Research (ESPR), European Society of Radiology (ESR); European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR); Federation of European Biochemical Societies (FEBS)| Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS); European AIDS Clinical Society (EACS); European Association for Cardiothoracic Surgery (EACTS); European Association of Nuclear Medicine (EANM); European Atherosclerosis Society (EAS); European Association for Study of The Liver (EASL); European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO); European Group for Blood and Marrow Transplantation (EBMT); European Cancer Organisation (ECCO); European College of Neuropharmacology (ECNP); European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS); European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS); European Hematology Association (EHA); European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA); European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO); European Research Council (ERC)