

European Journal of
Immunology

News and EFIS

Medical societies unite to support research in Europe

Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe



Why an Alliance for biomedical research is needed

Biomedical research in Europe is facing unprecedented challenges. Funding and support for research are far below that which has long been promised and is needed for sustained European competitiveness and innovations in biomedicine. New insights and therapeutic strategies are desperately needed to cope with the specific health-care problems of the ageing population. These challenges must be addressed at a European level but, unfortunately, European support currently falls short.

In 2002, the European Union (EU) committed itself, in what is known as the Barcelona Declaration, to gradually increase the share that the EU dedicates to research and development (R&D) to 3% of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 2010. Yet, today, the EU budget for research amounts to only 1.8% of its GDP. Furthermore, statistics recently published by UNESCO showed that in the 2002–2007 period, European investment had stagnated. This is not enough to support European efforts in innovation and associated economic growth.

This is not enough either if the European Union wants to keep up with the pace set by the USA or Japan, who respectively dedicate 2.7 and 3.4% of their GDP to R&D. More alarming is the recent arrival of a new competitor from Asia in the biomedical research area: China is investing massively in R&D, with an incredible increase in investment of 160% between 2002 and 2007. The current figure for R&D support in China is 1.75% of GDP and this is planned to increase to

2.2% of GDP by 2015. The ongoing tremendous growth of the Chinese GDP makes this figure even more impressive and challenging. The stagnated European research funding of 1.8% of GDP should then be compared to 2.7% in the USA, 3.4% in Japan and the planned 2.2% in China. European scientists are becoming increasingly worried about falling behind and losing competitiveness.

The past few months have seen the emergence of an Alliance of four European medical societies representing health professionals and researchers, joining forces to call for more support of biomedical research in Europe. The European CanCer Organisation (ECCO), the European Respiratory Society (ERS), the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD) and the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) officially founded the Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe (Biomed Alliance) on December 9th, 2010 in Brussels.

Biomedical research is fundamental to finding new ways to prevent and treat disease. This is strongly recognized by the four founding partners, which are all involved in the prevention, treatment and care of chronic diseases, which account for 86% of the WHO region mortality. The challenge, not least to the European economy, represented by the burden of these diseases is enormous. The Biomed Alliance has responded to the challenge by organizing a concerted effort to speak with one voice and strengthen biomedical research in the European Union.

The message has been well received by other European medical societies. Before it was even formally founded, the Biomed Alliance started to receive applications for

membership. The European Association for the Study of the Liver, the European Society of Hypertension and the European College of Neuropsychopharmacology are expected to officially join the Alliance shortly.

The aims of the Biomed Alliance are straightforward. The Alliance's principal goals and objectives are to promote the best interests and values of researchers across all medical disciplines in Europe, in those general areas where common interest is identified. The Alliance seeks to facilitate and improve biomedical research in Europe, develop a framework for better training and mobility of young researchers in Europe, and improve public understanding of medical science in Europe. Through its actions the Alliance intends to promote excellence in biomedical research and, thereby, improve the health and well-being of European citizens.

Within this broad framework, the Alliance has singled out two major goals for its first actions: to increase the extent and quality of European funding for biomedical research and to enhance participation of researchers in policy and decision making at the EU level.

Improve funding for biomedical research at the EU level

For biomedical research in Europe to attain excellence and be competitive, support and funding must reach across national borders. EU support through funding and policy-making have become key in this process, yet make up less than 10% in a typical research funding portfolio. A downside with EU funding is that the current procedures are too complicated and too heavily burdened by administration.

With regard to procedures, the Alliance has already contributed to the ongoing process of simplification and has offered views from its members to the EC and members of Parliament in a reply to EU plans. A particular point of concern is the lack of continuity of projects, since successful collaborations established under projects funded by the EC cease to exist when the projects reach their deadlines. This can be a tremendous waste of both money and important research infrastructures that have been established. The Biomed Alliance will encourage the European Commission to address extension conditions that would favour sustainable long-term research cooperation, prevent unnecessary duplication efforts and foster innovation. The administrative burden should also be reduced through simplification of funding schemes and accounting procedures, and through a more uniform and simplified follow-up.

These themes are also central in the ongoing debates regarding the future of the Framework Programmes. The EC published a green paper asking for input from the community regarding a novel common strategic framework (http://ec.europa.eu/research/csfr/index_en.cfm?pg=home). The Alliance is currently inviting its members to provide joint input into this important consultation.

While this mainly concerns the quality of the funding procedures, the major issue

will be to raise the level of funding. The Alliance will raise its voice at all levels of policymaking. The current share of biomedical research within the EU budget must be increased. In the Framework Programme 7, health research receives 6 billion Euro, some 10% of the total research budget for 2008–2013. This is not commensurate with research activities and needs and should be raised to 35%. In addition, total European research funding should be substantially increased to reach similar levels as for our major competitors, e.g. US\$ 30 billion/year spent by the National Institutes of Health.

The current situation also reflects the fragmented allocation and the complicated decision-making process where scientists are consulted at the fringe, but are not major participants in the process. The Alliance wants to be heard and claims that researchers should be full partners in policymaking.

Research within the broader framework of health care

Policymakers often fail to see the link between a strong and competitive research sector and a healthy and active population, which in turns contributes to European Union competitiveness. The Biomed Alliance wants to underline this

win-win situation to those, in Europe and in Member States, who make the decisions on research priorities and research budgets.

It is clear that the Biomed Alliance's strength is its ability to speak in one voice. Already, Ms Ruxandra Draghia-Akli, Director of DG Research at the European Commission Directorate General for Research and Innovation, has welcomed the union of the four founding partners and the formation of an Alliance for Biomedical Research. The membership of all the 28 associations and societies represented at the launching conference where she spoke represented no less than 400 000 researchers!

With the expertise and resolve of its members, the Alliance intends to achieve its objective of improving the conditions for innovative European biomedical research and, thereby, also the health of European citizens.

On behalf of the Alliance for Biomedical Research

Ulf Smith (EASD) President
Karin Sipido (ESC) Vice-president
Caroline Dive (ECCO) Vice-president
Laurent Nicod (ERS) Treasurer

www.biomedeuropa.org
e-mail: info@biomedeuropa.org

Meet EFIS at EULAR 2011!

To further develop bridges between basic and clinical sciences and to establish a strong clinical immunology network within Europe; EFIS is hosting a symposium during the Annual European Congress of Rheumatology, EULAR 2011 (London, 25–28 May 2011). The details of the EULAR-EFIS session are:

New myeloid subsets: New interactions and unexpected functions

Thursday 26 May 2011 from 15:30–17:00 in Capital Suite 14

Chair: Catherine Sautès-Fridman

Lecture 1: The “patrolling monocytes”: an independent monocyte subset, Frederic Geissmann

Lecture 2: Dendritic cells as sensors of environmental perturbation, Paola Castagnoli

Lecture 3: Novel perspectives in cancer immunotherapy, Hervé Fridman

Lecture 4: Chemokines and myeloid derived suppressor cells in liver inflammation, Christian Trautwein

Win the EFIS Lottery!

In addition to this symposium, you can meet the EFIS organization at their booth in the “EULAR Village” where you will have the chance to win travel bursaries and free registrations for courses and congresses.

For more information on EULAR 2011, visit <http://www.eular.org/>

For more information on EFIS, visit <http://www.efis.org/>



European Federation of
Immunological Societies

