Feasibility Study for Coordination of National Cancer Research Activities

Keywords
Collaboration, article 169, research priorities, quality control, survival, prevention, clinical trials, translational research

Summary
A key issue remains how effective coordination of Cancer Research in Europe can see the European Union (EU) benefit from the advantage of scale, which its population provides. Cancer research in EU is fragmented and frequently duplicative. Resources are wasted and implementation of closer cooperation to develop a strategy for Cancer Research by the Member States would clearly be cost-efficient and hasten the development of major advances and their delivery to the population. Barriers to collaboration in cancer research need to be identified and ways sought to encourage the development of collaborations in the Member States.

Problem
Cancer remains a major Public Health problem worldwide with Europe hit hard and the situation set to worsen in absolute terms as the population ages. Around one half of cancer patients still die from their disease. On the other hand, there are currently great expectations that we are on the brink of making huge progress against the disease. Elucidation of the human genome and rapid advances in understanding details of its function allied to rapid progress in technology, gives great hope of rapid advances taking place. The current era offers more real hope than any previous.

Cancer remains the subject of significant research effort at both the European level and in the Member States. Between 2002 and 2006, the European Union will be devoting more than €435 million to this field of research. This is in addition to national funding in Member States.

An important aim for the Commission is to achieve a better framework for collaboration in cancer research in Europe, and there is a recognition that coordination of national cancer research efforts at the European level is far from being achieved. Among the key elements proposed to explain this situation are the barriers between disciplines and fields of research; the fragmentation of research activities dedicated to the different types of cancer and the resultant sub-optimal critical mass; the weakness of the links between basic, applied and clinical research, leading to a rather limited integration of basic and clinical research; and the implementation of all these activities mainly in a national framework and a national context. As a consequence, Europe is unable to fully benefit from the advantage of scale afforded by its 500 million population.

Europe is at present, and has been for many years, unable to retain many of its most talented scientists and is unable to provide a scientific environment capable of attracting top young scientists from outwith the continent. In addition, there is no national incentive to promote mobility within the Member States. Consequently, the development of transnational research activities is impeded by the obstacles to the mobility of researchers.

A further obstacle is the lack of common core elements in the curriculum of professionals. Common quality standards in training are needed to facilitate the collaboration at European level as well as the mutual recognition of the qualifications between European countries and therefore the mobility of researchers and physicians. The situation is particularly exemplified by the absence of recognition of Oncology as a Medical discipline by many European countries and its variable status in most Member States.

Consequently, although a large amount of financial resources is involved, and a substantial portfolio of initiatives is carried out, cancer research efforts are not currently benefiting from the advantages that a coherent and more co-ordinated framework would bring about.

Aim
On the basis of an overview as complete as possible of Cancer research in Europe, objectives of the project are to:
1. Identify the fields, topics and research subjects where the lack of co-ordination of national activities is particularly detrimental for the progress of knowledge and the quality of care;
2. Identify those specific fields, topics and research subjects where the awareness of the need, as well as the willingness and readiness to achieve a better co-ordination, are established enough as to make such an achievement likely;
3. Explore the suitability, for this purpose, of the various support schemes available in the Sixth Framework Programme (Coordination actions; ERA-NET schemes; article 169);
4. Explore, in particular, the interest and feasibility of an initiative based on article 169 (participation of the EU into national research programmes jointly implemented);
5. Help determine the means by which further exploring the possibilities and ways to progress in the direction of a better co-ordination (study, workshop, conference, survey);
6. Give orientation on all the issues above raised and practical recommendations on the last points.
Expected results

The project shall provide key answers to the following questions through the exploration of barriers to Research Collaboration in the EU in specific fields as well as by dealing with some of the key issues including mobility of cancer research workers throughout the European Union:

• Irrespective of the prospects generated by considerations of alternative legal, governance and financial matters, including article 169, what can be done to facilitate Cancer Research in the European Research Area?
• What could be done to enhance Cancer Research in the European Research Area by new application(s) of available legal, governance and financial considerations, including article 169?

Potential applications

The project is certainly going to have a major impact on the structure of Cancer Research, basic and clinical, throughout the EU. Furthermore, the EU will dispose of concrete and practical recommendations for the definition of priorities in research programmes.

Coordinator

Peter Boyle
International Agency for Research on Cancer
Lyon, France
E-mail: director@iarc.fr

Partners

Harry Bartelink
The Netherlands Cancer Institute
Department of Radiotherapy
The Netherlands Cancer Institute/
Antoni van Leeuwenhok ziekenhuis
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Filippo Belardelli
Department of Cell Biology and Neurosciences
Istituto Superiore di Sanita’
Rome, Italy
E-mail: belard@iss.it

Julio Cels
Institute of Cancer Biology
Danish Cancer Society
Copenhagen, Denmark
E-mail: jec@cancer.dk

Diana Dunstan
MRC Research Management
UK Medical Research Council
London, United Kingdom
E-mail: diana.dunstan@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

Alexander M.M. Eggermont
Erasmus University Medical Center
Department of Surgical Oncology
Erasmus MC – Daniel Den Hoed Cancer Center
Rotterdam, The Netherlands
E-mail: ammegermont@erasusmc.nl

John M. Fitzpatrick
Surgical Unit – Mater Misericordiae Hospital
University College Dublin
Dublin, Ireland
E-mail: johnmfitzpatrick@mater.ie

Jan-Willem Hartgerink
International Affairs Department
Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport
The Hague, The Netherlands
E-mail: jw.hartgerink@minvws.nl

David Kerr
Department of Clinical Pharmacology
The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford
Radcliffe Infirmary
Oxford, United Kingdom
E-mail: david.kerr@clinpharm.ox.ac.uk

Peter Lange
Unterabteilung 61: Gesundheit, Biowissenschaften
Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung
Berlin, Germany
E-mail: peter.lange@bmbf.bund.de

Jose Martin Martin-Moreno
Professor of Medicine and Public Health
Medical School, University of Valencia
Valencia, Spain
Herbert Michael Pinedo  
VUMC Cancer Center Amsterdam  
Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
E-mail: hm.pinedo@azvu.nl

Ulrik Ringborg  
Radiumhemmet-Dept. of Oncology  
Karolinska University Hospital Solna  
Stockholm, Sweden  
E-mail: ulrik.ringborg@karolinska.se

Dimitrios Trichopoulos  
Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology  
School of Medicine  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens  
Athens, Greece  
E-mail: ditrichop@hsph.harvard.edu

Thomas Tursz  
Direction Générale  
Institut Gustave Roussy  
Villejuif, France  
E-mail: tursz@igr.fr