

EPAAC Work Package 8 – Coordination of Cancer Research meeting Summary Report Berlin, 22 March 2012

Overview of the day's events

The morning session comprised a series of presentations:

- by ECCO on the state-of-play of the questionnaires that were sent out to Member States prior to the meeting requesting information on the coordination of cancer research in their country; on difficulties encountered with regard to EU-level coordination of cancer research funding;
- by DG RTD: a presentation of existing experience with research funding coordination and an overview of expected results of future EU efforts on research coordination;
- by the Cancer Society of Finland, on the Nordic Cancer Union.

The afternoon session comprised a "Tour de table" and plenary discussion on the way forward and main conclusions.

Cancer research coordination - what is the state of play?

In the tour-de-table, participants explained the various systems in place for coordinating cancer research in their countries. Coordination practices varied across the different Member States, ranging from small coordination initiatives in individual cities to larger-scale efforts aiming at collaboration between public and private research funders across the board at country level.

At European level, most participants were aware of cancer research coordination projects supported by the European Commission, and some other models of European-level coordination were described, including international cooperation initiatives integrated within national cancer research programmes and collaborative undertakings between countries, e.g. the Nordic Cancer Union.

Cancer research coordination - What are the potential difficulties?

While most participants agreed that coordination of cancer research at national level is important and in many cases should be improved, key difficulties identified included:

- **Resource constraints** – coordination is costly and time-consuming
- **Fragmented organisation of political competencies**, for example different ministries dealing with different types of research
- **Divergent agendas** of ministries
- **Lack of communication at government level**, e.g. between relevant ministries
- **Funding not disease-specific**. Research programmes often deal with health in general, rather than individual diseases through dedicated budget lines

- **Competition between researchers/ research institutions for funding.** Such cultural and psychological factors may hinder cooperation and sharing of resources.
- Sub-optimal **communication between researchers and funders**
- **Lack of information** on what research is being carried out and by whom.
- **Different objectives of funding organisations** due to the various stakeholders behind them and the different sources of funding

Potential difficulties specific to cross-border/ EU coordination included the following:

- Differences in **national legislation**, e.g. bio banks
- Lack of understanding of **what is needed at EU level**
- **Willingness** of the different partners to take part is required.

Key Conclusions & Follow-up

The meeting revealed general interest and a positive attitude towards coordination at EU level and the need for better mutual information. However it would be very important to define coordination first. In particular, smaller countries often feel left out of coordination efforts and would welcome it more. The discussion also revealed that EU coordination relies somewhat on better national coordination and that practices vary significantly between countries. The presented example of Nordic cooperation showed that the key component of that cooperation was mutual trust. Some countries envisaged a voluntary, "à la carte" approach to EU coordination at this stage. The development of stronger links between cancer research and cancer care were also evoked as being important.

The meeting showed that beyond the standard cooperation and coordination that exist through projects, there is a need for better information sharing between Member States, and it would be worth considering the possibilities to accommodate such a need. The Commission will take these conclusions into account when considering its future actions, and ECCO will make use of them when elaborating action in the framework of the implementation of Work Package 8 of the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer.