

## REPORT

# European Parliament Interest Group on Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases “Fostering Medical Research Excellence in Europe”

European Parliament Brussels

10 May 2017

**Roberta Metsola**, (MEP and Chair of the Interest Group) opened the meeting by emphasizing the essential role that the EU is playing in the field of research and innovation. Moreover, she stated that the European Commission has supported research in this area through many initiatives, in particular mentioning the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), Europe's largest public-private initiative aiming to speed up the development of better and safer medicines for patients. IMI supports collaborative research projects and builds networks of industrial and academic experts in order to boost pharmaceutical innovation in Europe. Given the importance and the long-term added value of medical research, the European Parliament as well as the European Commission has to provide and maintain platforms for stakeholders and specialists to collaborate in research and exchange of information. Ms. Metsola stressed that the EU research policy should be aligned with the key EU goals, in particular with the need to support employment and hence, reduce disability, absenteeism in the workplace and early retirement.

**Maria-José Vidal-Ragout**, (Head of Unit “Non-communicable Diseases and the Challenge of Healthy Ageing”, DG Research and Innovation, European Commission) explained to the audience that € 507 millions were invested in total during the last 10 years for research on RMDs. The patients take a leading role in research and innovation which reflected into the policy design, as well as into the specific projects. She also addressed the importance of meeting patients’ needs, in particular by evaluating the impact of health technologies and interventions, promoting frontline research, innovation and education as well as producing recommendations to health authorities in order to decrease the burden for patients with RMDs. Ms. Vidal-Ragaout highlighted several upcoming trends in the fields, in particular the development of new therapies, Cohorts, E-health, boosting translation of health research results, innovative procurements for health care and HTA research. In the course of the interim evaluation of Horizon2020, the European Commission received 3483 responses and over 300 position papers from 69 countries. More than 90% of the participants agree that Horizon2020 priorities address the current challenges confronted by the EU. Also the complexity of the funding process was assessed in the course of this evaluation. Oversubscription resulted as one of the most commonly quoted issues of Horizon2020. As a reaction to this result, the European Commission is already working on solutions on how to reduce the oversubscription rates by reducing the scope of calls, as well as



increasing the overall budget. The evaluation also revealed that some aspects of evaluation feedback could be improved, as well as the distressing trend of decrease in the total amount of international cooperation projects. In general, the interim evaluation revealed that increased budget is needed and program oversubscription is an urgent issue. The programs should better address citizens' needs. Market-creating innovation should be further supported, but at the same time, a balance between research and innovation should be struck. Collaborative projects which combine research and innovation schemes and clearly address stakeholder's needs are essential. Ms. Vidal-Ragaout underlined the indispensable role that EULAR takes in advising the European Commission; she is also looking forward to future collaboration opportunities. **Roberta Metsola** also emphasized that without the role of EULAR it would be even more difficult to map out similar programs that make sense and are easy to implement.

**Prof. Colm O'Morain**, (President, Alliance for Biomedical Research in Europe) highlighted the need of biomedical research being the center in the next framework program, emphasizing that biomedical research is a driving force for economic success as it raises the level of excellence and competitiveness across Europe. Moreover, a blended approach between broader and more specific calls, as well as more comprehensive feedback in the context of proposal evaluation could contribute for the next framework program. The creation of a mechanism for investment and funding of investigator independent clinical trials could also benefit to the quality of life and health of EU citizens. He also stressed that the EU has to develop a more strategic science based-coordination and an expert advisory group within the European Commission.

**Prof. Hans Bijlsma**, (President-Elect of the European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR)) thanked the previous speakers for their interesting and valuable presentations. He also informed the audience that WHO recently named RMDs as part of the priority areas for their work on Non-Communicable Diseases.

The RheumaMap identifies unmet needs and challenges, as well as priority areas by mapping the state of development of research and innovation in RMDs. EULAR developed a multifaceted-approach that includes a clear policy dimension that can generate a positive evolution in the management of RMDs along the entire pathway. The Task Force encompassed 22 members, including clinicians and scientists as well as representatives of health professionals and patients. Prof. Bijlsma mentioned that a consultation with the broad RMD community took place, which generated much appreciated added value. The RheumaMap has to be seen as a dynamic tool, focusing on most prevalent RMDs and being constantly updated. It defines priority areas based on the impact of different RMDs, identifies current unmet needs for selected RMDs and recommends research focus areas to address those needs. The key recommendations include ways to prevent the onset of RMDs and ways to optimize care of people with existing RMDs. Successful implementation of this RheumaMap is expected to contribute to better prevention of onset of RMDs, to improve early diagnosis of RMDs, achieve higher levels of secondary prevention of RMDs and optimize care of people with RMDs. Mr. Bijlsma stated that EU funding should concentrate on the most costliest diseases with high economic impact and closed his presentation by highlighting that EU support is crucial to achieve excellence in RMDs by bringing together a critical mass at European level.



**Magda Gunn**, (Scientific Project Manager, Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI)) specified that IMI facilitates open collaboration in research to advance the development of, and accelerate patient access to, personalized medicines for the health and wellbeing of all, especially in areas of unmet medical need. Furthermore, IMI provides the necessary scale by combining funding, expertise, knowledge, skills and resources and building trustful collaborations upon a creative spirit as well as innovative and critical thinking, but still remains a neutral platform where all actors involved in drug development can engage in open collaboration.

In course of the closing discussion the speakers and the audience highlighted the importance of patient's involvement through public consultations, workshops on patients needs in certain areas and online platforms. Ms. Metsola also touched upon the fact that in the health sector in general, very little attention is placed on medical research for children's' diseases. Mr. Bijlsma revealed that especially in the field of Rheumatology, there is a very active group of pediatricians working closely with rheumatologists to achieve the best possible outcome and gain long-term value for treatment and prevention of RMDs among the younger generation.