



Europe's largest Member Association for Cancer Research

ANNE-LISE BØRRESEN-DALE

Department of Genetics,
Institute for Cancer Research
The Norwegian Radium Hospital
N-0310 Oslo, Norway
E-mail: alb@radium.uio.no

It is a great pleasure to be invited to contribute a short article on EACR to 'Periodicum Biologorum' and I extend my warmest greetings.

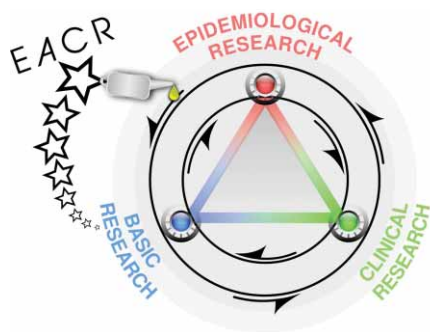
The European Association for Cancer Research (EACR) celebrated its fortieth Anniversary in 2008 and I was honoured to become its President. As a member society for researchers, EACR has always had one guiding aim 'The advancement of cancer research'. In pursuing this aim, the Association provides services to members, presents educational, training and scientific meeting opportunities, and facilitates communication and collaboration between the cancer researchers who make up its membership. It also sets out to raise the profile of cancer research and cancer researchers in Europe and the need for sustained political and economic support.



The Association's membership has grown very rapidly in recent years and we expect to number close to 10,000 by the time of our main conference this summer. I am delighted that EACR-21 is being held in my home city of Oslo at the end of June and will build on the great success of the anniversary meeting in Lyon. The EACR bi-annual conference still sits at the very centre of our activities and we set out to provide the very best meeting possible with outstanding international speakers, well focussed symposia, educational workshops and opportunities to meet experts in their field. Young researchers are an important part of the conference and have opportunities to present their work both through the poster sessions and in the 'Presidential Sessions' where the authors of the most impressive abstracts are invited to speak. In order to increase opportunities for students and 'early career' researchers to attend, EACR has again increased the level of bursary funding. This will support the participation of more than forty applicants.

EACR travel fellowships have become increasingly popular over the last two years and the quality of applications is particularly high. This has required a steady increase in the available budget as the Association has tried to support all high quality applications. Reports from fellowship winners are published in our Year Book each April and can also be read by visitors to the EACR website. There is no doubt that a period of working in a new context, in a centre of excellence, is of great encouragement to researchers.

EACR's new initiative to provide highly focussed meetings saw successful Symposia on 'Chromatin and Cancer', 'Transcription and Cancer', and 'Inflammation and Cancer' last summer. The 'Inflammation'



meeting followed the ECCO 15 – 34 ESMO congress in Berlin where EACR members recognised the impact the Association on the scientific programme: The basic science and translational 'tracks' offered much of interest for our members. As a sponsoring agency, EACR also supports important scientific meetings and symposia organised in Europe, publicises the meetings and ultimately publishes informative follow-up reports.

Members are very positive about the quality of EACR communications, valuing the Annual Newsletter that has developed to become the Association's 'Year Book', the regular e-mail news bulletin and an increasingly sophisticated website.

EACR has grown quickly through the interest of individual members but most rapidly through the affiliation of Member Societies across Europe. I was delighted to welcome 'Hrvatsko društvo za istraživanje raka' as a Society Member during my term as President. I am most honoured to be invited to speak at HDIR's first international meeting in November and I look forward to meeting many members of the Association at 'HDIR-1'. HDIR is, of course, represented on the EACR Council by HDIR President Sonja Levanat, and we look forward to building on what is already a very constructive partnership.

EACR finds a political voice as a founder member of ECCO, is involved in the development of the Academy of Cancer Sciences, and is delivering a work package as part of the Eurocancercoms project. A short background to the Eurocancercoms project and EACR's current work is included below.

All in all, EACR has a lot to offer, welcomes the active involvement of its members – old and new – and is keen to respond to their needs and interests.

EACR SHARES RESPONSIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CANCER RESEARCH MANAGERS FORUM FOR THE DELIVERY OF 'EUROCANCERCOMS WORK PACKAGE 2'

The project

The Eurocancercoms project aims to involve all with an interest in cancer, from researchers and doctors to patients. It is an initiative of the European Institute of On-

colony and is led by ECCO – the European CanCER Organisation and *ecancermedicalsience*. It is funded by the European Commission.

The aim is to establish a single, efficient network for cancer communication in Europe.

Eurocancercoms will look at issues surrounding the communication and dissemination of cancer information across Europe, identify the bottlenecks and suggest solutions.

It will do this by:

- examining the flow of information between basic scientists and other healthcare professionals
- assessing the way cancer research results are disseminated and identifying the existing barriers to successful dissemination
- establishing searchable databases for clinical trials and guidelines that are available to all involved in cancer care, including patients
- using new technologies, particularly internet-based technologies, to create a networked cancer community, including health professionals, patients, consumer groups and industry
- writing policies for promoting the best ways of disseminating cancer science across Europe.

EACR's role in Eurocancercoms

The initial stage of information gathering, wider consultation and report writing has taken place in the period leading up to EACR-21. Members attending the Association's meeting in Oslo have been invited to a consensus meeting to share thoughts on the initial findings following the completion of a highly focussed questionnaire.

EACR members based in Europe were recently surveyed on science communication and their use of the web. The results of the survey will now shape the way the project develops.

There was an excellent response to the survey and it was possible to draw some very clear conclusions from the data produced. The high level of response and the large number of optional text comments showed that efficient communication is an issue in which many European cancer professionals are interested, and on which they hold strong opinions.

Across the different demographics such as geographic location, age and career level there was an extraordinary level of convergence in the answers given. Although there may be individual issues of concern for those in different countries and institutes, most scientists across Europe face similar problems with communication. This was echoed in the text responses given, with many respondents independently listing the same problems and suggestions.

Lack of a central location

The most frequently mentioned problems when using the Web were a) the lack of time and b) the lack of a

central location from which information could be retrieved. There appears to be an issue of too much information and too little time, resulting in an increased use of search engines, which are not specifically catered to the scientific community. Many respondents called for an integrated website or search engine which they could use to access the information they need.

The public and the media

Respondents rated the public as the hardest group of all with whom to communicate. The survey shows that those whose research is released via press release consider reports in the media to be significantly less truthful and accurate than the original press releases. Many commented that the non-scientific media are liable to mislead the public, for example by reporting discoveries in basic science as major breakthroughs, which engenders a general lack of understanding about basic science. One respondent suggested that since the internet is »filled with information of poor quality and reliability«, informative and reliable websites should be set up to communicate with the public about scientific discoveries.

Communication and collaboration

Many respondents indicated that they find it hard to make contacts with other researchers, for example for sci-

entific collaboration. Many respondents said they can only make contacts at meetings (at which attendance is limited, especially for those with limited budgets), which indicates that more needs to be done to increase openness and collaboration within the scientific community. Communication between different groups of scientists, i.e. basic, translational and clinical, was rated as poor, and several commented on this as an area where improvement is needed. Many respondents suggested that a social-professional, »Facebook-like« network for cancer scientists would assist with this.

Open access

Although none of the questions in the survey mentioned open access, many respondents commented on the cost of journals and articles and the need for more journal articles to be open access. This appears to be an especially serious issue for those whose institutes have limited budgets and cannot afford to subscribe to many journals.

These conclusions will be discussed at EACR-21 in Oslo at the EACR Council, Executive Committee and at a special Eurocancercoms Consensus Meeting. The outcome of these meetings and the full results of the survey will be made available at www.eacr.org in the Eurocancercoms section.