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Editorial

European cooperation on healthcare: report on the FPM-HPT conference at Erasmus University in Rotterdam

European cooperation is crucial for providing the highest possible quality of healthcare for its ~740 million citizens. Many international organizations and institutes participate in European projects and research initiatives that enable better clinical care and develop health policy for which goals are often unattainable when operating solely within one's own country. Good cooperation can lead to innovative solutions that can be used beyond European borders and have a vital impact on global health.

However, there are many challenges that can jeopardize cooperation and successful innovation across countries. Challenges can relate to funding, ethical, clinical and political barriers. Regulatory and practical challenges may also jeopardize success.

The latest Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine conference was held at Erasmus University in Rotterdam in the Netherlands on 21st June 2019 to emphasize the need for European Cooperation on Healthcare [1]. The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for discussing best practice across the above key healthcare domains.

The conference was jointly hosted by the FPM's Elsevier-published journal Health Policy and Technology and the Erasmus School of Health Policy and Management (ESHPM, Erasmus University Rotterdam), with as local organisers Associate Professor Ken Redekop (HPT Editor-in-Chief) and researcher Lytske Bakker (HPT Commissioning Editor). Content from the meeting will appear in the HPT journal as editorials, commentaries, review articles and *Meet the Expert* reports, with associated short video interviews with speakers posted on the HPT and FPM websites.

Barbara Pierscionek, Associate Dean for Research at Nottingham Trent University (UK), discussed ethical and legal challenges when developing joint programmes involving European cooperation on healthcare. Issues include maintaining confidentiality when sharing real world data within registries and other big health data. Professor Pierscionek, an expert in ethico-legal issues relating to secondary data use, made it very apparent that much still needs to be done before we can ensure that secondary data use is centralized around the patient's needs and wishes.

Another presentation questioned the ethics of current distribution of European research funds. Zoltán Kaló, Professor of Health Economics at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest (Hungary), discussed ways to improve equity in allocation of healthcare research funds by the European Union. Currently there appears to be a disproportionate allocation of EU research awards to EU15 countries. This both disadvantages research capacity development in EU13 countries and leads to a 'brain drain' of researchers from EU13 to EU15 research centres. Professor Kaló also presented several recommendations that policymakers could adopt to improve the current situation.

The importance of European policymaking was also discussed by Liese Barbier, Marcus Guardian and Donald Singer. Pharmacist Liese Barbier, European Medicines Agency, discussed European Medicines Agency perspectives on regulating biosimilars. She stressed the importance of batch-level information when reporting any suspected adverse drug reactions from biosimilars or corresponding biological medicines. She also discussed the high quality standards of the EMA when approving biosimilars, as well as the challenges for decision making when unbiased information is lacking.

Marcus Guardian, CEO of EUnetHTA, The European Network for Health Technology Assessment, discussed his organisation's role in cross-border assessment of health technology. The Network enables collaborative research and tries to avoid duplication of research. However, many challenges remain relating to improving stakeholder engagement and stimulating national use of joint assessments.

Donald Singer, President, Fellowship of Postgraduate Medicine, London discussed engaging with European health policymakers, including new networking opportunities among health professional, patient and consumer organisations and EU institutions such as the European Medicines Agency.

Access to novel drugs was also addressed by Carin Uyl-De Groot, professor and head of the health technology assessment department at Erasmus School of Health Policy & Management in Rotterdam. Professor Uyl-de Groot discussed sustainability and affordability of innovative drugs. She described discussions with European policymakers on ways to reduce the costs of expensive biological treatments. Developing cross-border partnerships would create much greater bargaining power for purchasing medicines. For example, the EU region currently represents 40% of the market for most pharmaceuticals.

Ines Hernando from the EURORDIS-Rare Diseases Europe organization discussed the initial impact of the 2017 European Reference Network Directive to improve the care of the ~30 million patients in Europe with rare diseases. The resulting new European Reference Networks are already providing virtual rare disease management support platforms for health professionals across Europe.

Public-private partnerships are essential to improve healthcare. Therefore, Jorge Gonzalez and Marjan Hummel discussed challenges and solutions for developing healthcare innovations. Jorge Gonzalez, Chief Executive Officer of Ticbiomed (Spain), spoke on the EU-funded inDemand model now operating in Spain, France

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and Finland, with additional network partners throughout Europe. InDemand makes a virtue of needs-driven rather than technology-driven project commissioning as a more reliable approach to ensuring adoption of new approaches into clinical practice. Examples included mobile health applications to reduce weight in obese children and e-health systems to support management of women in pregnancy.

Marjan Hummel from Philips Research in Eindhoven (The Netherlands) discussed how an early assessment of the potential impact of a novel technology in terms of costs or health benefits can influence investment decisions. Moreover, Dr. Hummel addressed international implications for streamlining development of new health technologies.

Respiratory physician Marlies Wijsenbeek from Erasmus Medical Center (Rotterdam, The Netherlands) discussed patient registry development to improve management of and research into rare lung diseases, based on her work on idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. She noted the potential value of developing cross-border patient registries for rare diseases to ensure larger patient populations than possible within individual countries. She also illustrated some of the challenges, such as when the structure and contents of datasets are not agreed on or when the same patients are included in multiple registries.

Another clinical perspective was provided by Ron de Winter from the Department of Epidemiology at the University Medical Center in Utrecht (The Netherlands). He discussed the multi-country European COMBACTE public-private partnership. COMBACTE aims to contribute to address the challenges of multi-drug bacterial resistance by enabling clinical trials of novel antibiotics. Since many sites are needed to gather robust evidence on the efficacy of antibiotics, an extraordinary amount of effort is required by individual partners to achieve this.

Local host Ken Redekop, Editor-in-Chief of the FPM's Elsevier-published Health Policy and Technology journal, discussed themes and opportunities for publication in the journal on topics from across the diagnostics/drugs/devices/e-health spectrum, complemented by papers on health technology adoption and associated health policy implications.

The speakers at the conference on European Cooperation on Healthcare represented a broad range of disciplines and highlighted various key ways in which cooperation can improve healthcare. The speakers also emphasised different ways in which multidisciplinary collaboration and cross-border cooperation go hand in hand. Throughout the day it was apparent that much remains to be done but much has also been achieved. Insights from these achievements need to be shared with experts in other fields. If not, researchers, clinicians and policy makers will be destined to make the same mistakes that others have made before them.

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