

Strengthening research partnerships for better health and sustainable development

Charles S. Mgone and Michael Makanga

The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, The Hague, The Netherlands

The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, Cape Town, South Africa

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The European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) was established by the European Union in 2003 in response to the global health crisis caused by the major three poverty-related diseases (PRDs) HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. EDCTP supports clinical trials against these diseases in sub-Saharan Africa, through the partnership of its European member states with their African counterparts and like-minded organisations. The programme involves collaborative research that facilitates cooperation and integration of corresponding national research activities and programmes of the participating countries. During the first phase from 2003 to 2011, EDCTP launched 191 projects that included 56 clinical trials on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria: 30 studies concerned drug treatment and 18 vaccines while 8 (four each) focussed on microbicides and diagnostics. All projects are taking place in 29 sub-Saharan countries in partnership with the participating European member states. As international collaboration is a funding prerequisite, EDCTP stimulates and encourages multi-country activities ensuring a closer collaboration between national programmes in the north and the establishment of new north-south and south-south collaboration. EDCTP organises a biennial forum which provides a platform for scientists from Africa, Europe and other regions to share information and views, and to create and strengthen collaborative links. Majority of the researchers from the participating 148 African and 42 European institutions attend these forums.

The Sixth EDCTP Forum was held on 9–12 October 2011 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The theme of the Forum was *Strengthening Research Partnerships for Better Health and Sustainable Development*, taking into account the past, present and future of EDCTP. The theme emphasised the strong commitment of EDCTP to improving health through partnership in research and development. The concerted efforts of all partners in the development of products for the fight against PRDs will contribute to attain better health for all populations, a fundamental building block for achieving sustainable development. Mr Robert-Jan Smits, Director-General of Research & Innovation at the European Commission (EC), participated in the forum and reaffirmed that what has been achieved provides a fine example of what can be done when there is a 'true and equal partnership between stakeholders'.

Scientific presentations

More than 60% of the scientific presentations made at this forum were from EDCTP funded research projects. Moreover, some of these researches addressed research priorities that were defined on the basis of recommendations of the Fifth EDCTP Forum. The core structure of the forum comprised presentation of scientific results for the disease areas of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. For each disease keynote addresses summarised recent advances in research. Individual researchers presented their work in the parallel sessions on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. These

presentations had three overarching themes: the achievements and results of clinical research in sub-Saharan Africa; the development of scientific research capacity in sub-Saharan Africa; and North-South and South-South partnerships as an instrument for the improvement of research quality in sub-Saharan Africa.

The HIV/AIDS presentations dealt with a range of topics including epidemiological studies at potential trial sites; immunology and vaccine development; preventing mother-to-child transmission; antiretroviral safety and efficacy studies; drug resistance; benefits of antiretroviral treatment for physical and mental health; treatment of HIV opportunistic infections and other HIV associated conditions such as mental and mood disorders; safety biomarkers; factors influencing disease progression; HIV subtype distribution; community attitudes focus group studies; and good clinical practices in resource-limited countries.

The tuberculosis (TB) presentations also covered a broad range of topics such as: the work of the Pan-African Consortium for Evaluation of Anti-tuberculosis Antibiotics Network (PanACEA); the evaluation of pharmacokinetic (PK) variability of TB treatment drugs; studies assessing different approaches and products towards TB treatment shortening; progress on TB diagnostics; drug dosage optimisation in HIV-infected patients receiving TB treatment; biomarkers research; TB immunology and vaccines in development; the use of nanomedicine to improve the efficacy of existing TB drugs; and epidemiological studies involving comparison of active and passive case finding in different settings.

Several of the malaria presentations concerned the evaluation of antimalarial drug treatments for uncomplicated malaria in children and infants, pregnant mothers, and adults with HIV co-infection; the use of intramuscular and intravenous artesunate in the treatment of severe malaria in children; gametocyte infectivity; the treatment of asymptomatic carriers; and progress on malaria vaccine studies including viral vectored vaccines (AdCh63 ME-TRAP prime and MVA ME-TRAP boost) and a MSP3-GLURP fusion protein malaria vaccine (GMZ2).

Presentations on cross-cutting issues considered trial registration, research ethics, clinical data management, and the activities of the EDCTP-funded regional networks of excellence, namely, the Central African Network on TB, HIV/AIDS and malaria (CAN-TAM); the East Africa Consortium for Clinical Research (EA-CCR); Trials of Excellence for Southern Africa (TESA); and Capacity building to prepare West African sites for clinical trials on HIV, TB and malaria (WANETAM).

Partnerships

Twelve global health organisations which are partners of EDCTP, presented their work and the areas in which they collaborate with EDCTP. The activities of NACCAP (the Netherlands-African partnership for capacity development and clinical interventions against poverty-related diseases), the Enhancing Support for

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Strengthening the Effectiveness of National Capacity Efforts platform (ESSENCE) and the ‘Switching the Poles’ Clinical Research Network which are closely linked to EDCTP, were also presented.

Awards

The EDCTP’s Senior Scientist Award was bestowed on Professor Salim Abdool Karim, Director of the Centre for the AIDS Programme of Research in South Africa (CAPRISA). EDCTP’s Junior Scientist Award went to Hannock Tweya of the Lighthouse Trust, Malawi.

The next forum will be held in 2013.

Acknowledgement

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