



Innovative Medicines Initiative

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PRESS RELEASE

- **EUROPAIN addresses challenges in the treatment of chronic pain**

BRUSSELS, 13 May 2012 – Chronic pain is invisible, but for the people suffering from this hard-to-treat problem, it can be overwhelming. In the IMI project EUROPAIN, scientists from research institutions, universities and pharmaceutical companies have come together to learn more about the basic biology behind chronic pain. This will create a solid knowledge base to speed the development of drugs, known as analgesics, to treat pain.

Around one in five adults in Europe have chronic (long-term) pain, i.e. lasting for more than six months, and on average for about seven years. A fifth of sufferers have had pain for more than 20 years, and many end up having to give up work. There are many treatments available for pain, both on prescription and over the counter, but few are effective against chronic pain, and many come with unpleasant or even dangerous side effects.

Many pain drugs fail in development, and this wastes precious resources, as well as leaving patients still waiting for effective treatments. The EUROPAIN researchers, led by German company Grünenthal GmbH and King's College London, UK, are looking to improve the chance of drugs making it through to the market through improved animal models and new technologies, so that the transition from animal studies to human clinical trials goes more smoothly.

The project's Academic Lead, Stephen B McMahon, FMedSci, FSB, Sherrington Professor of Physiology at King's College London, and director of the London Pain Consortium, commented: "In our preclinical studies, we have used novel technologies like next generation sequencing, genomics and proteomics and these have revealed some new mediators of pain that we can use in drug development."

The EUROPAIN project is also working to make clinical trials more effective. In trials that use placebo or dummy drugs as a comparison with the active drug, the placebo may actually alleviate some people's pain, even though it doesn't contain any drug at all. The so-called placebo effect can make the results of the trial unclear, and may be one of the reasons that drugs don't make it through to the market.

Project Coordinator Märta Segerdahl, Senior Medical Director at Grünenthal GmbH, commented: "Working in non-profit public-private partnerships is the way of the future. By working together and analysing data from existing phase III clinical trials, which is often not publicly available, we may be able to understand more about the causes of increased placebo responses, and how to reduce its effects."

Biomarkers, which are characteristics that measure health or disease, can be used to help drugs move through the clinic and onto the market. They can be used to select the patients who are most likely to respond to certain treatments, or who might experience fewer side effects. By including just these patients in clinical trials, this means that drug studies can be faster, smaller, more efficient and cheaper. Crucially, they can improve quality of life for the study volunteers. EUROPAIN has made significant progress in this area.

IMI Executive Director Michel Goldman said: "The high quality of the research coming out of EUROPAIN demonstrates that public private partnerships excel at delivering results that are not only scientifically excellent, but can be applied to speed up the development of new treatments for chronic pain."

This work is part of the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), a collaboration between the European Union and the pharmaceutical industry. By supporting the exchange of knowledge and expertise among companies and between public and private partners, IMI is generating achievements and taking on research challenges that are too great for any individual company or organisation to tackle alone. The ultimate goal of IMI is to speed up the development of safer and more effective medicines for patients.





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More information:

Project factsheet: <http://www.imi.europa.eu/content/europain>

Project website: <http://www.imieuropain.org/>

Press contact:

- Catherine Brett – IMI Communication and Events Manager
Tel: +32 2 541 8214 - Mobile: +32 484 896227 - E-mail: catherine.brett@imi.europa.eu
 - Emily Jones – Media Consulta Senior PR Consultant
Tel: +49 30 65 000 308 - Email: e.jones@media-consulta.com
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About the EUROPAIN project

The EUROPAIN project aims to improve the treatment of patients with chronic pain. Three renowned academic pain consortia, from Germany, Denmark and the UK, have joined forces with a Spanish SME and with Europe's most active pharmaceutical companies working on pain. The scientists are searching for changes in the nervous system that contribute to pain, in order to fill the gaps in the current knowledge of chronic pain. They will elucidate the mechanisms of pain, using novel experimental models, human volunteers and clinical data of pain patients. They will search objective methods to measure pain in patients and they will examine the mechanisms that are activated by placebo (dummy) pain medication.

The scientists are also examining how genetic factors, depression or anxiety, and psychosocial factors increase the risk of developing chronic pain, as well as the influence of gender on pain. By identifying the mechanisms involved in chronic pain, the EUROPAIN consortium is opening possibilities for better treatments for patients.

More info: www.imieuropain.org

About IMI

The Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) is the world's largest public-private partnership in health care. IMI is improving the environment for pharmaceutical innovation in Europe by engaging and supporting networks of industrial and academic experts in collaborative research projects. The European Union contributes €1 billion to the IMI research programme, which is matched by in kind contributions worth at least another €1 billion from the member companies of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA).

The Innovative Medicines Initiative currently supports 40 projects, many of which are already producing impressive results. The projects are all working to address the biggest challenges in drug development, to accelerate the development of safer and more effective treatments for patients.

More info: www.imi.europa.eu

