


DNDi

drugs for neglected
diseases initiative

Newsletter No.3
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In 2000, the European pharmaceutical industry invested 14.5 billion euros in R&D: a fifth of all industrial R&D in Europe. Of this, only 1% came from the state.

Source: EFPIA Annual meeting, Bruges, 26 June 2002;
Ministry of Research and Higher Education, France.

A Busy Month

February has too few days for what needed to be done. Each of the Interim Team members has been racing to meet deadlines in preparation for the Founding Partners Meeting in Paris on 13-14 March. Moreover, there were meetings to attend, DNDi presentations to make, and legalities to iron out.

Raising Interest Levels in Nairobi

Bernard Pecoul and Els Torreele were in Nairobi from 12-14 February primarily to meet the director of the **Kenya Medical Research Institute, KEMRI**, and its Chief Research Officer Dr Monique Wasunna, to further strengthen support and collaboration for the AfricaDNDi. KEMRI offered DNDi assistance in pre-clinical research, clinical trials, natural products research, epidemiology, as well as identification of R&D needs and opportunities. In addition, planning and preparation for the May meeting of AfricaDNDi was discussed.

The public seminar on DNDi at KEMRI, organized by Monique, was attended by almost 100 participants who were keen to know more about, and work with, DNDi. The national press and TV covered the event.

Bernard and Els also visited the directors and scientists of two other institutes. At each meeting, participants were briefed on DNDi and discussed possible contributions to the AfricaDNDi network:

- **Kenyan Trypanosomiasis Research Institute, KETRI**, offered to collaborate where possible. Although 85% of KETRI's activities focus on animal trypanosomiasis control, screening of active trypanocidal compounds and even certain pre-development/development activities for veterinarian and human drugs do overlap.

KETRI has specific expertise in this area and in especially validated animal models.

- **African Medical and Research Foundation (AMREF)** offered in-kind contributions such as identifying needs, agenda setting, developing "patient representation", conducting clinical studies, identifying partners and medical expertise, and networking. They are also interested in making available simple and cheap diagnostic tools for use at health centres.

Bernard and Els also met briefly with the management of Cosmos Limited, a local generics producer. Cosmos was interested in assisting DNDi by producing affordable drugs to address the needs of the Kenyan population.

Amidst Scientists and Snow

On 6 February, Jaya Banerji presented DNDi to the Swiss Trypanosomiasis Meeting held high up in the Swiss Alps, in Leysin. The event provided an opportunity to interact with scientists, new and experienced, focused on discovering more about trypanosomiasis and developing drugs for the disease. A significant amount of interest in DNDi was generated and a number of scientists wished to be included in our database. Their names are available with Patricia Martorell.

Participating in Public Debate

Yves Champey participated in a public debate organized by the Geneva University School of Medicine. The other speaker was Rony Brauman. The theme was "Drugs, the Pharmaceutical industry, and poor countries". Around 100 people attended.

A Call for Project Ideas

In keeping with the mission to identify promising projects for the DNDi portfolio, on 13 February, DNDi sent out a call for

letters of interest for drug discovery and drug development projects focusing on human African trypanosomiasis, Chagas disease, and leishmaniasis. This call for proposals within the global scientific community was kindly organized by WHO/TDR, one of DNDi's Founding Partners, as an in-kind contribution to the initiative. The letter was sent to their network of over 2,000 scientists, and has also gone out to at least a thousand more scientists worldwide.

The letter, available on both the TDR website <http://www.who.int/tdr> as well as MSF's Access Campaign website: <http://www.accessmed-msf.org/dnd/dndi.asp>, expressly states that all research and activities likely to lead to new drugs for the three diseases will be considered. The last date is 15 March 2003.

DNDi Founding Partners Meeting: Teaming Up to Address Neglect

The Founding Partners held a meeting in Paris on 13-14 March at Institut Pasteur to discuss the way forward for DNDi. Each Founding Partner institution was represented by its director general or a delegate. The meeting was productive and many decisions were taken. The three sessions, the public debate, the press conference, and coverage in the French media will be detailed in next month's newsletter.

The first session began on Thursday, 13 March at 2pm, and was followed by a public debate in the evening. The debate centred on a DNDi presentation by Yves Champey to an invited audience of over 120 people comprising scientists from Institut Pasteur, MSF and French academic institutions.

The second session of the meeting on Friday, 14 March was followed by a successful press conference. All the Founding Partners spoke about their contributions to the DNDi. Over 20 journalists from the French press attended.

The final session began after lunch at 1.30pm and ended at 4.45pm.

In the run up to incorporation, the Founding Partners discussed and agreed upon several key issues: Primarily, the DNDi charter and by-laws, the composition of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Advisory Committee, and the contributions of Founding Partner institutions to DNDi. They also approved a Recruitment Strategy, a Financial and Funding Strategy, and a Communications and Advocacy Strategy for 2003.

IDDP Update

The final signatures for the concretisation of the EU grant of 1.2 million Euros for the FACT project have now been obtained.

Communications Round up

DNDi database. The database now has almost 1,200 names. Any information that needs to go out to MSF will be emailed to Julia Double or Laure Bonnevie who will then forward it to their mailing list.

DNDi website. DNDi will be working with a website designer: Magic Software, based in Delhi, India. Approval of contract is awaited from MSF Foundation in Paris.

Domain name. We have obtained www.dndi.org from its American owner. By the end of March we should have DNDi email addresses that end with @dndi.org. This should help bolster our identity.

Worldwide protection of the DNDi logo is under consideration.

Video. A DNDi promo video will be produced in time for the launch in July 2003. It will also be used as a fundraising tool. Shooting will start at

the Paris meeting on 13 March when Founding Partners will be interviewed on film. A crew will film on location in kala azar and sleeping sickness endemic regions of Africa (Kenya and South Sudan). They will interview patients, doctors, as well as scientists from regional laboratories. A crew will also film kala azar related footage in India and possibly Chagas related footage in Brazil.

Information Technology. With the help of experts we will develop the use of IT for communication and exchange of information, both internally within DNDi, and externally with the scientific community, on project management, organizing databases for clinical trials etc.

DNDi Events in 2003

So far, not much has changed in this list, and it is presented here as a reminder.

- Founding Partners Meeting: 13-14 March, Institut Pasteur, Paris
- AfricaDNDi conference: 7-9 May, Nairobi
- Incorporation of DNDi: July, Geneva
- Neglected Diseases Conference: October-November, Malaysia (to be confirmed)

Spreading the Word at non-DNDi events

A reminder of the events at which DNDi will be represented:

- Tropical Communicable Disease Workshop: 28 Apr-1 May, Rio de Janeiro
- Culmination of Flytrap Exhibition: mid-May, Washington
- TDR Annual Meeting: 23-25 June, Delhi
- BIO (Biotech Industry Organisation): 22-25 June, Washington

Corrigendum

Apologies for the following factual errors that cropped up in Newsletter 2:

- Eloan Dos Santos Pinheiro has retired from Far Manguinhos and is no longer a representative of the Founding Partner, Oswaldo Cruz Foundation, Brazil. Her retirement has created a void that has yet to be filled.
- Yves Champey is a physician and former R&D executive in the pharmaceutical industry. He is currently a consultant for the biotech industry and has volunteered to be director of DNDi.
- Paromomycin studies have not yet begun, but are expected to begin shortly.

Contact us

If you wish to contribute to the newsletter or would like to comment on any of the above topics, please write to jaya.banerji@geneva.msf.org

Your suggestions are welcome.