

Leishmaniasis Research Network (redeLEISH)

Mady M. Barbeitas¹; Joelle Rode¹; Marina Boni¹; Byron Arana²

¹ Drugs for Neglected Diseases *initiative* Regional Office Latin America, Rua Santa Heloísa 05, Jardim Botânico – 22460-080. ² Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative, Chemin Louis-Dunant 15, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland. Email: redeleish.coordenacao@dndi.org

Introduction

Since DNDi's creation, partners in endemic countries have been involved in its mission to develop treatments that are adapted to neglected patients' needs. Establishing disease specific clinical platforms has been key to reinforcing local clinical research capacity and to building up new capacities where necessary. These platforms stimulate both North-South and South-South collaborations to build and sustain capacity in endemic countries. To achieve such a goal, the Leishmaniasis Research Network (redeLEISH) was first outlined in 2013 with the identification of investigators and reference centers in Cutaneous Leishmaniasis (CL) in Brazil. From 2013 to the first half of 2014, DNDi visited various research centers in order to map the capacities for clinical trials for CL. RedeLEISH was officially launched in September 2014 with the support of the Brazilian Ministry of Health and FIOCRUZ. Twenty-eight investigators attended to the first meeting in Rio de Janeiro (see picture below):



Objectives

RedeLEISH aims to:

- Promote exchange of technical and scientific information;
- Provide a discussion platform to facilitate consensus on research priorities and harmonization of clinical trial design;
- Encourage debates on R&D challenges in leishmaniasis and strategies to ensure public health impact of the new treatment options developed;
- Support the implementations of collaborative research projects to maximize existing resources and competencies;
- Strengthen institutional capacity for clinical research through the implementation of training courses.



Methods

RedeLEISH is coordinated by DNDi with the support of a Technical Committee comprised of representatives from key partner institutions. The network operates through a web forum – a virtual tool that allows information sharing and discussions between members – together with annual meetings and an annual newsletter, InfoLeish (see pictures above).



Pictures: the first edition of redeLEISH newsletter and the welcome page of the Web forum.

Results

In just three years redeLEISH has extended to include members from other endemic and non-endemic countries and currently it counts 83 members from 44 institutions across 8 countries in Latin America and 2 in the Old World (see map below). Its members include experts, investigators, National Control Programs officers, PAHO representatives, international organizations and patients. Since the launch of the Web forum in October 2015, 140 contributions have been compiled, mostly scientific publications and courses opportunities.

The second annual meeting held in Medellin, Colombia, with the support of Ruta N and PECET/University of Antioquia was attended by 65 members. In 2016, the third meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with the support of BNDES and FioCruz, and had 67 participants. It reinforced the commitment to research and provided enriching discussion panels and meetings. The highlights were:

- The workshop on harmonization of criteria for the conduct of clinical trials in CL, with the presence of 10 key investigators from disease endemic countries.
- The access workshop which aimed to identify the main bottlenecks in access for leishmaniasis treatments and to propose priorities to guide an access strategy.
- The TDR/WHO presentation on how the efficiency of clinical trials can be improved.
- The exposition of advances in the development of topical and local treatment for CL.

- 83 members
- 44 institutions
- 10 countries



Conclusions

RedeLEISH acts as a driving force to encourage collaborative projects and to implement clinical trials for leishmaniasis in a coordinated way, in order to maximize existing resources and competencies. In that sense, this network will play an important role in delivering short duration, safe, efficacious, affordable, and field-adapted treatments.



Picture: the third meeting of redeLEISH in Rio de Janeiro.