



Top Institute Pharma

International Scientific Review Committee

Report on the fifth meeting, June 9 and 10, 2008, in Leiden, the Netherlands

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Report of the fifth meeting of the International Scientific Review Committee (ISRC) on June 9 and 10, 2008, in Leiden

Summary

The ISRC convened for the fifth time on June 9 and 10, 2008, in Leiden to discuss (scientific) progress in setting up TI Pharma. Next to this the staffing of the program was discussed. Furthermore, the courses for PhD students were discussed in detail as well as the plans to engage in the Education & Training pillar of the EU Innovative Medicines Initiative.

The committee is satisfied with the fact that 42 project agreements have been signed and believes that TI Pharma is well on its way. It is clear that in some projects the participating groups collaborate intensively, but in other projects collaboration can be improved. Effort should be devoted to encourage collaboration, while at the same time 'backing the winners' should be the strategy when considering expansion of the existing project portfolio. Furthermore the committee endorses the mandatory education and training program for both PhD students and Post-docs. Its focus on translational aspects is a valuable add on for TI Pharma fellows.

Introduction & agenda

On Monday June 9 and Tuesday June 10 the ISRC convened for the fifth time with the TI Pharma Management Team and (part of the) program staff.

Members of the ISRC are:

Prof. dr. E.J. Ruitenbergh (chair, Professor of International Public Health, Free University Amsterdam, ex RIVM and Sanquin)

Prof. dr. A.T. Florence (former Dean of the London School of Pharmacy)

Prof. dr. P. Krosgard Larsen (President of the Carlsberg Foundation and professor at the Danish University of Pharmaceutical Sciences)

Dr. R. Laing (WHO Geneva, author of the Priority Medicines report)

Prof. dr. L. Lesko (Food and Drug Administration, USA, unable to attend the fifth meeting)

Prof. dr. R. Metternich (Merck Research, West-point, Pennsylvania, USA, unable to attend the fifth meeting)

Prof. dr. T.M. Jones, CBE (ex Wellcome Foundation, ex ABPI)

The meeting, which started on Monday afternoon and lasted until Tuesday, end of the afternoon, started with an introduction of TI Pharma's new Managing Director, Willem de Laat. The rest of the agenda for this 1½ day meeting focused on:

- An overall status update including the start of the full Strategic Research Program and the Education & Training program
- A presentation on the composition of the scientific workforce
- A detailed overview of the PhD courses and the plans to engage in the Education & Training pillar of the EU Innovative Medicines Initiative
- An update on 'euSEND', the initiative to address (Most) Neglected Diseases
- A discussion with Principal Investigators of three projects

Each of these topics is addressed below.

Status update

The committee was updated on the startup of the Strategic Research Program. Since the last meeting in October another 21 project agreements were signed, making a total of 42 signed agreements. One project has been canceled due to withdrawal of the industrial partner and one project is still under discussion. The large participation of Small & Medium sized Enterprises (SME) is an accomplishment. Within EU Framework programs a financial participation goal of 15% is set, and almost never reached, TI Pharma with around 30% financial participation is well above this goal.

It is clear that TI Pharma is now fully up and running and it should put all its efforts in ensuring the progress within these projects as well as work on new areas to prove the sustainability of the institute. TI Pharma is in year one (the startup phase has ended Q3 2007) and four years is a very short time to prove itself.

For its continuity, installing a rolling budget system might be a good strategy, allowing to continuously startup new projects instead of starting in blocks of four years. However, this should only be done when an appropriate long term commitment for financial support is ensured.

The collaboration with the two other biomedical Public-Private Partnerships CTMM and BMM is encouraged. It is good to see that back office processes are aligned and also links from a content perspective are being made.

The total investment by the Dutch government and the private and academic sector in

these initiatives is unprecedented. Notwithstanding these investments, it remains to be seen if the Netherlands will achieve its commitment to the "Lisbon" agreement: reaching a level of R&D investments of 3% of our GDP in 2010. By its nature, the life science sector is very R&D intensive. It is therefore a challenge for both the sector and the Dutch government to contribute in reaching the Lisbon goals.

The Spring meeting on April 22 is briefly discussed. With over 500 participants from all partners and 8 parallel sessions this was a successful event. Some ISRC members attended the meeting and really enjoyed it. Suggestions were made for a plenary speaker for next years Spring meeting.

The output of the pediatrics workshop in October is a paper which is currently being finalized. On June 23 a workshop will be run with the topic 'Systems Biology: inspiration from Chinese Medicine?' The committee made a suggestion for a topic for a next workshop: validation of biomarkers, and in particular its influence on 'time & cost to patient'.

Scientific Workforce

Karin Huiberts presents an overview of both the staffing of the various projects as well as the background of researchers. 80% of the positions (PhD students, post-doctoral researchers and technicians) are staffed. The aim is a 90% staffing by the end of 2008. Especially in, for example, bioinformatics it is difficult to find high quality researchers. TI Pharma is assisting Principal Investigators with e.g. flyers to promote these vacancies. The majority of PhD students and post-docs are Dutch citizens. 25% of the PhD students are foreigners; 33% of the post-docs are foreigners. In line with the nature of the jobs (PhD student and post-doc) most are employed by universities. The public-private character of the projects becomes clear when looking at the different project members in the intranet platform. The percentage of participation by global companies and SME's then increases to over 40%.

TI Pharma is linked up with the Dutch Post-Doc Career Development Initiative (www.pcdi.nl). The committee endorses these types of initiatives. Career and development and leadership training and development are important, also in academia.

Education & Training and European ambitions

The content and schedule of the two PhD courses are presented and discussed in detail. The Business & Entrepreneurial Skills has run once and will run for a second time on June 11-13. The first run was successful: for most participants the subject was totally new and they both appreciated the lectures and casework.

From June 24-27 the Drug Discovery Cycle will run for the first time. This course is also targeted at PhD students and covers the entire drug discovery/development process, from target discovery to registration and marketing. Next to lectures, interactive sessions include short case discussions and debates on various propositions.

The committee is pleased by the fact that TI Pharma covers these more generalist topics on top of existing education and training programs. The setup and content looks good. Next to the TI Pharma Education & Training program, the ambitions on a European scale are discussed. The integrated approach for the Education & Training pillar within the Innovative Medicines Initiative is very good.

Update on euSEND

The plans and setup of the European Solutions Enterprise on Neglected Diseases are presented and discussed. (A flyer is available with more information.)

These plans build upon the analysis which was discussed in the previous ISRC meeting

(see also remarks made on the focus of this initiative in the report on the 4th meeting). The discussions with possible investors are ongoing and are progressing, albeit slowly. It is still very uncertain if this venture can be established. The committee recognizes the efforts put into this area and feels that if it will succeed it would be a really direct proof of the added of TI Pharma.

Discussion with PI's

Three projects were presented by the Principal Investigators and Project Managers, and discussed in detail:

T1-103: CXC Chemokine receptors – PI: Alletta Kraneveld

T2-108: Metalloproteases in endothelial dysfunction – PI: Jo de Mey

T3-105: Kinases in cancer – Daily Supervisor: Jos Jonkers

The discussions were lively and generated critical questions to sharpen the projects further. It is clear that some projects collaborate intensively, but others not so much, although the science clearly is top quality. Effort should be devoted to encourage collaboration. Backing the winners' should be the strategy when considering expansion of the existing project portfolio.

The role of the program managers was also discussed. The committee recognizes their considerable effort to run ~20 projects each. It is good to see that especially the larger projects have a dedicated (part time) project manager function incorporated next to the Principal Investigator. In some cases this function is executed by an experienced post-doc. In general, the program and project management capacity of TI Pharma and its increasing experience in this area is a very valuable asset of TI Pharma.

In conclusion, the committee is pleased to see that TI Pharma stays on track to make a difference, both in the Netherlands as well as on an international scale.