

PRESS RELEASE

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STIMULATING TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Thirteen European research institutions in life sciences within the EU-LIFE Alliance have suggested ways to stimulate translational research without undermining frontier science and academic freedom

Most would agree that transforming lab findings into clinical applications—known as “translational research”—should be an important goal for biomedical research. Yet it is widely acknowledged (by the general public, by scientists, by funding agencies) that this process needs to be faster and more effective. How can research institutes and organisations reach this goal without undermining frontier science or infringing on the scientific freedom of their scientists?

To address this, thirteen top European research institutes in life sciences—all within the framework of the EU-LIFE Alliance—have now shared their experiences, made recommendations and identified measures to promote translational research. Their conclusions appear in the September issue of the journal *Trends in Molecular Medicine*. “*We all have the same challenge: to provide scientific freedom to our researchers while also translating fundamental findings into innovative applications in medicine. By sharing experiences, thoughts and actions, we identified some good practises and guidelines that we want to share with the scientific community and relevant stakeholders,*” explains Michela Bertero, chair of the Translational Research working group in EU-LIFE and head of the International and Scientific Affairs Office at the Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG) in Barcelona, Spain.

The authors first identified the different major phases of the research process, ranging from understanding the core principles of biological systems to developing a new treatment, for instance in disease-oriented research and clinical research. The authors then analysed their different good practise systems and experiences within the Translational Research Working Group of the EU-LIFE Alliance. Based on this, they were able to draw up a list of five measures that they believe would improve, promote and stimulate translational research:

1. **Interdisciplinary research and training:** providing interdisciplinary training to basic and clinical researchers will help the new generation of physicians/scientists to better understand and address clinical needs from different angles and across different disciplines;
2. **Collaborate to identify and address unmet clinical needs:** collaborating within projects and initiatives allows basic and clinical scientists to better identify unmet medical needs in diagnosis, prevention and treatment;

3. **Nurture international translational research:** relevant expertises need to be identified and then matched to each other, and collaborations with national and international stakeholders need to be fostered, since excellent research groups with complementary expertise improve high quality translational research;
4. **Create shared research resources:** it is important to leverage the different areas of expertise of partners and collaborators to share resources, such as when recruiting patients or using data or state-of-the-art research facilities;
5. **Stimulate a cultural change:** fostering interactions with relevant stakeholders will help to promote a cultural change at both the individual and the organisational level. Awareness and motivation is needed from all staff and groups, as this requires a team effort.

The authors pointed out that not all the responsibility for stimulating translational research falls on the research institutes: policy makers and funding agencies must also have key roles. To this end, and based on the experience of these European institutes, the authors also include a list of seven recommendations for policy makers and funding agencies, such as creating specific evaluation and rewarding systems for scientists doing translational research or promoting cultural changes among all players.

“We live in an exciting era in which basic discoveries are making their way to the clinic. Our societies and governments should commit to scientific research and make it a national priority. It has been a very interesting exercise to share experiences between all the EU-LIFE partners and to try to define these guidelines—a challenge that hopefully will help other institutions and organisations,” said Momo Bentires-Alj, group leader at the Friedrich Miescher Institute for Biomedical Research (FMI) in Basel.

Reference: Bentires-Alj *et al.*: “Stimulating translational research: several European life science institutions put their heads together,” *Trends in Molecular Medicine*, 2015. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.molmed.2015.07.002>

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