

VIEWS FROM THE IEA COUNCIL

News from the IEA European Epidemiology Federation

A group of European Young Epidemiologists?

The idea of organizing a network of European Young Epidemiologists (EYE) within the IEA European Epidemiology Federation was first put forward in our Department at the University of Porto Medical School. During the European Congress of Epidemiology held in Porto, Portugal, in September 2004, we discussed the idea with young people from several countries and the idea was received with enthusiasm and interest. We also sought the opinion of the Board of the IEA-EEF that also widely accepted the idea. Since first making contact with IEA members and from secondary contacts informed by these members, we have already received almost 50 e-mails from young epidemiologists, working all over Europe, asking for more details and offering all kinds of support.

What are the problems facing the EYE?

- (i) Although we share a research methodology and a way of thinking, there is wide heterogeneity in our background education and training, as well as in the type of employers we work for (academic, public or private research, etc.). There is no consensus on the definition of an epidemiologist. If we are to build our future as professionals, we need to start by being able to state what makes us epidemiologists.
- (ii) Research practices are undergoing rapid changes. Increasingly they require additional competences beyond scientific know-how, such as the capacity to coordinate teamwork, and the ability to answer societal concerns. We need to identify the new skills necessary to help young scientists to cope with new research conditions—skills in team or project management, communication, and evaluation of research budget planning.
- (iii) Despite local factors that will obviously continue to exist, Europe is becoming smaller every day. Common problems should be more easily solved by cooperation among epidemiologists from different countries. This way, both ideas and funding sources can be shared and put together to achieve common goals.

Recently, there have been some initiatives to create networks of young scientists in Europe with a view to stimulating the culture of cooperation through the transmission of ideas and attitudes. At the instigation of the EuroScience working group 'Future of Young Scientists', representatives of the three principal associations of Young Scientists in Europe (Marie Curie Fellowship Association, Eurodoc, Pi-net) were invited to participate in the Young Scientists Programme of the EARMA/EuroScience conference (June 2002). The four networks agreed to join forces and set up the Joint Working Group on Young Scientists. So far this initiative has conducted a survey, set up a

discussion forum, and organized the 'Science and Technology Based Professions in Europe' (2002) and 'Early Stage Researcher Mobility in Europe: Meeting the Challenges and Promoting Best Practice' (2004) conferences. A reportedly unexpected outcome of the 'Science and Technology Based Professions in Europe' conference was the increasing awareness of a commonality of problems faced by young scientists throughout Europe, in spite of a background of social environments as diverse as those of the UK and central Europe. New generations of scientists seem to have a higher perception of their responsibilities towards European societies.

Without denying that some of the problems of all European young scientists, in all disciplines, are the same as our own, there are specific issues within epidemiology that should be discussed and dealt with among epidemiologists. Our current view is that, if the future is ours, we should start building it now. Our ultimate aim is to implement the best practices in epidemiology and to promote high-quality research, in order to best serve our society.

In practical terms, the aims of such a group are:

Short-term (until July 2005)

- To establish contact among young epidemiologists in Europe (who we are, where we work, areas of scientific interests for research, what specific problems and resources we share).
- To hear from everyone about ideas and projects that could be developed within this group in the longer term.
- To have one representative in the EYE from each of the national epidemiological associations that belong to the IEA-EEF; in each case this young epidemiologist would act in consultation with the representative that each national society currently has in the Board of the IEA-EEF.

Medium-term (until January 2006)

- To organize a scientific session for the next European Congress of Epidemiology to be held in Utrecht, The Netherlands, in 2006 (we had approval for this from Professor van der Heijden, Chair of the organizing committee of Euroepi2006).
- To choose a representative to speak on behalf of the EYE group in IEA meetings and other settings; this person could also become a member of the Board of the IEA-EEF.
- To choose a correspondent who would write on behalf of the EYE group in the Newsletter of the IEA-EEF.
- To raise funds to support the attendance at this and other IEA meetings by EYE members.

Long-term

- To establish links between Young Epidemiologists in order to facilitate future collaboration in scientific research.

- To engage in the development of epidemiological research methods, in order to promote and advance their quality.
- To foster the appropriate use of epidemiological research in the domains of public health and clinical medicine.
- To discuss and intervene in the future of epidemiological research; for instance, in opportunities for funding.
- To spread information within the group about high-quality educational programmes for graduate students in epidemiology in Europe

The first step we intend to take in order to establish this network of EYE is to establish who we are and where we work.

Therefore, if you are:

- an epidemiologist or a graduate student in epidemiology (Master or PhD).
- younger than 35 years.

please let us know by visiting us and filling in a short form at <http://higiene.med.up.pt/eye>.

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