

International Agency for Research on Cancer



Scientific Council
Forty-sixth Session

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Princess Takamatsu Hall*

DIRECTOR'S REPORT AND UPDATE FROM THE FORTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL

Introduction

1. The Forty-fifth Session of the Scientific Council (SC) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) was held in Lyon between 28 and 30 January 2009. Dr A. Markham was elected Rapporteur. Apologies for absence were received from Dr V. Shanta (India) and Dr G. Forni (Italy).
2. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for its work and especially for the useful comments and advice on IARC future priorities.

General remarks

Contact with Scientific Council

3. Regular teleconference calls with the Chair and Vice-Chairs of both the Governing and Scientific Councils have been instigated during 2009. The discussion and decisions of these calls are recorded in informal notes. The Scientific Council Chair is able to use these notes as a basis for a more regular briefing to Council members. In addition, the Director has sought to involve Scientific Council members in advisory groups: examples this year include the International Advisory Group on Cancer Registration (Professor Blettner, see 16 below), the Advisory Group on Education and Training (Dr Zaridze, see document SC/46/8) and in the planning of the WHO Classification of Tumours "Blue books" (Dr Hermann, see 19 below). Together with participation of Scientific Council members in the peer-review process for Sections on an annual basis the aim is to create a more dynamic involvement in the work of the Agency.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

4. In recent years, the Scientific and Governing Councils have requested the Agency to draw up key performance indicators (KPIs) appropriate to the Agency's role as both a research centre and a provider of information and support. In its discussion of the IARC Interim Annual Report, the Director noted the comment from the Scientific Council that "Scientific quality and relevance to the mission of IARC were recognized as the key considerations." It is important that the KPI measures are therefore broader than those typically considered in national higher education establishments or research institutes (e.g. impact factors of journals, grant income). Whatever

KPIs are adopted, these need to be transparent, the quality of information as well as the analysis need to be to the highest standard available, a dialogue needs to be established with both Agency and external scientists and a sound methodology used.

5. The Director has developed a proposal (see document SC/46/9) for discussion at the Forty-sixth session of the Scientific Council. This document outlines the principles for sound KPIs relevant to the Agency mission and proposes some specific KPIs for consideration by the Council. The views of the Council will be taken into account in further in-house discussion prior to preparation of a document on the topic to be presented to the Governing Council at its 52nd Session.

Response to particular items and recommendations

Biostatistics and Epidemiology Cluster (BEC) Review, held at IARC in November 2007

6. Disappointment was expressed at the responses of the previous Director to the November 2007 Review. The current Director indicated that he would respond to the Review, partly through the new planned scientific structure.

7. In the reorganization in early 2009, a new Section of Cancer Information (CIN) was established, specific to cancer registration and related information. This provides a focus lacking in the former Cluster structure. The Director is pleased to announce the recruitment of Dr David Forman from the University of Leeds and also Head of Information at the National Cancer Intelligence Network, UK as Head of Section. Dr Forman will take up his new role as of 1 April 2010. Given the progress in restructuring and recruitment the Chair of the Scientific Council advised the Director against the need for a repeat of the BEC review in 2010.

8. The Information Technology Services (ITS) have been transferred from BEC to the supervision of the Director of Administration and Finance to reflect the comment in the BEC review that this was more of a support group. The Radiation Group (RAD) has been moved from BEC to a Section on Environment where there are more synergies with other research groups. The Nutritional and Database Resource Team (NTR) has been moved to a new Section on Nutrition and Metabolism (NME) and renamed the Dietary Exposure and Assessment (DEX) Group. The Director is pleased to announce the recruitment of Dr Isabelle Romieu from the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico as Head of Section of NME. Dr Romieu will take up her new role as of 1 March 2010.

9. The Epidemiology Methods and Support Group, led by Dr Autier was renamed the Prevention Group and was established as part of the Section of Early Detection and Prevention. However, Dr Autier resigned from his post in November 2009 and as a result of this and comments from the joint Governing/Scientific Council Working Group in October 2009 regarding priorities for the IARC Medium-Term Strategy, the Group was abolished.

Consolidated document regarding IARC Scientific Review Procedures

10. The Director welcomed the efforts made by the Scientific and Governing Councils to have a precise and structured approach to peer-review in the Agency. This item was fully discussed during the 51st Session of the Governing Council.

11. In 2008, the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Scientific Council re-drafted the text of the scientific review procedures, removing as much extraneous material as possible. Some of the formal terminology had been removed and a new scoring system included which gave equal emphasis to scientific quality and to relevance to the role of the Agency.

12. The guidelines and procedures have flexibility built into them to allow minor changes to be made. If necessary, minor modifications could be reported back to the Governing Council rather than requiring its agreement in advance.

13. The Governing Council adopted the new "Guidelines for IARC Scientific Review Procedures" to be used as from 2009 and authorized the Chairperson of the Governing Council, upon the request of the Chairperson of the Scientific Council, to adapt the guidelines in light of experience in conducting reviews. Any such adaptations shall be presented to the next session of the Governing Council for approval.

14. The Director would like to discuss this further, in light of the experience from the Review of Infections Section held on 4–6 November 2009 (under item 8. of the current Provisional Agenda SC/46/1 (Prov.), dated 28 October 2009).

Specific Cluster presentations

15. A number of points were raised by the Scientific Council with respect to specific Cluster presentations. These points formed part of the reorganization and setting of priorities in the new Sections during 2009. Priorities can be found in the proposed Medium-Term Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2010–2014 (see document SC/46/7). Specific responses include the following:

16. In relation to BEC, an *ad hoc* international Advisory Group was convened (24–25 September 2009) to consider the approaches the Agency may take to supporting cancer registration activities in low- and medium-resource countries. The Advisory Group included members of the Scientific (Professor M. Blettner) and Governing (Dr J. Harford) Councils and its findings will be used by the new Head of Section in formulating future strategy. The plans for RCTs on vitamin D and cancer will not be pursued following the departure of Dr Autier. The Radiation Group has been strengthened by the provision of a technical post on the regular budget of the Agency for 2010–2011 and an increase in non-pay budget. The Director took a major initiative in helping finalize the INTERPHONE study; this was resubmitted in revised form in December 2009 following responses to the reviewer's comments.

17. Points in relation to the EBC Cluster are covered in the peer-review of the Section on Infections.

18. In respect to the Genetics and Epidemiology Cluster (GEC) much of the focus has been developed through the new Medium-Term Strategy, notably in linking the genetic association studies to analysis of functional effects of genetic variants in the Agency's laboratories and in

trying to improve environmental exposure assessment by an investment in biomarkers including the analysis of epigenetic markers in population studies.

19. During a meeting on 30 June 2009 in Lyon, in which Dr Herrmann, Scientific Council member, was a participant, the Director attracted the attention of the Series Editors on the applicability of the "Blue Books" in low resource-countries. As a result, it was decided that the books may include "diagnostic algorithms of tumours" for major histologic types to assist pathologists in low-resource countries to use the information. In addition, the Agency renegotiated the income from IARC book sales with WHO Press with the result that investment in production of the current 4th Series of volumes proceeds more quickly.

Evaluation of the Scientific Report of the Molecular Carcinogenesis Cluster (MCC) Review

20. The Director noted the points raised by the Scientific Council.

21. Please refer to document SC/46/5 for a complete response regarding the actions taken following the above-mentioned review.

Future priorities

22. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for the fruitful discussion and for its general support of the directions outlined in his presentation. He is also grateful for the encouragement from the Scientific Council to take the action he felt necessary to restructure IARC.

23. During 2009 the Director reviewed the current Cluster, Group and Team structure and decided that this was not optimal for delivery of the future mission of the Agency. Notably there were some research areas of poor fit within specific Clusters, a lack of clear expectation of the leadership through the Cluster structure and some ambiguity as to the status of Clusters, Groups and Teams.

24. A decision was taken to reorganize the scientific structure of the Agency into Sections, with one or more Groups comprising a Section; Teams would either be elevated to Group level or subsumed into existing Groups. The underlying principles for the reorganization were that the new structure should be consistent with the major research activities of the Agency as outlined in the Director's plan to the Scientific Council; provide clear line management and support for career development of all staff; develop strong leadership through the role of Section Heads; and ensure that research across Sections is facilitated.

25. A total of ten Sections was created. These give increased emphasis to core areas such as cancer information (including cancer registration), the Monographs programme and early detection and prevention. In addition, the changes created the environment for recruitment of senior leadership in the Sections of Cancer Information, Nutrition and Metabolism and of Biomarkers.

26. In order to support the scientific activity, two leadership committees were created. The first is the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), comprising the Director, all Heads of Sections, the Director of Administration and Finance (DAF) and the Head of Communications. The primary role of the

SLT is to provide strategic leadership to the Agency through its advice to the Director. Its mandate is detailed in the attached Terms of Reference (see Annex 1 below). The second leadership committee is the IARC Operational Team (IOT), comprising the DAF, the Heads of the Support Services (Finance, Human Resources, Buildings, Information Technology, Grants, Communication), and one Section Head. The primary role of the IOT is to ensure the support services enhance the scientific activity of the Agency.

27. The proposed restructuring plan was presented to all staff by the Director in an open presentation on 10 March 2009. The Director subsequently invited written signed comments from any member of the Agency for a period of approximately one week. A total of sixteen responses was received. As a result a number of improvements were made to the original plan, notably to the names of Groups and Sections and precision with respect to the Terms of Reference of the Committees and Role of Section Head. The final structure was decided by the Director and implemented on 14 April 2009.

28. In contrast to the Sections of Cancer Information and Nutrition and Metabolism, recruitment of a Head of Biomarkers was not successful. In addition, following review of existing strengths in biomarkers in laboratory-based Groups, comments by the Governing Council Working Group on 1–2 October 2009 and a careful review of the budget for 2010–2011, the Director decided to follow an alternative approach to developing this important area. First, this involves creating a Biomarkers Group in the Section of Nutrition and Metabolism, thus adding strength to the existing laboratory staff in the Section and focusing a biomarker effort in an area where major progress can be envisaged. Second, by adding a P2 scientist post to the Mechanisms of Carcinogenesis Section, with a focus on biomarkers. Each of these initiatives presupposes collaborations across Sections in the Agency in relation to biomarker development.

Ethics Review

29. The Director presented his proposal (in document GC/51/16) to the Governing Council at its 51st Session for a single integrated Institutional Review Board (IRB). This proposal was supported by the Governing Council and the Director has constituted a new IRB with more external membership, including members from low and medium-resource countries. The new IRB began its functions in January 2010.

Proposal for the use of Voluntary Undesignated Contributions to be presented to the Governing Council

30. This item was fully discussed during the 51st Session of the Governing Council. The proposals are part of placing priority on research in low and middle-income countries but in the context of specific projects with both short- and long-term outcomes. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for the interesting debate over the proposals and for the recommendation that the suggestions be approved by the Governing Council.

31. After discussion, the Governing Council thanked the Scientific Council for endorsing the Director's proposals for special projects in low- and medium-resource countries and approved the use of US\$ 1.0 million from the Voluntary Undesignated Contributions Account to cover the

cost of three Special Projects in low- and medium-resource countries: a) improving the coverage and quality of data from cancer registries in Africa, Asia and South and Central America (see paragraph 15 above); b) recruitment of skills in behavioural and sociological research initially focused on screening in low-resource countries; and c) the Gambia Hepatitis Intervention Study (GHIS) – approximately 50% of the funds would be spent on the cancer registries and approximately 25% each on the other two projects.

IARC Medium-Term Strategy

32. The Governing Council at its 51st Session agreed to a timetable which involved a draft IARC Medium-Term Strategy and Implementation Plan (2010–2014) being considered first by a Governing Council Working Group on 1–2 October 2009. The Working Group members were, for the Governing Council: Herman Autrup (Chairperson – Denmark), Christine Fitzgerald (Canada), Pascale Flamant (France), Joe Harford (USA), Irene Keinhorst (Germany), Duk-Hyoung Lee (Republic of Korea); for the Scientific Council: Harry Comber (Rapporteur), Bart Kiemeneij, Edgar Rivedal, Elaine Ron and for WHO: Andreas Ullrich. The Director, the Director of Administration and Finance (Hichem Lafif) and two IARC Senior scientists (Silvia Franceschi and Pierre Hainaut) were also part of this Working Group. The comments from that meeting* were taken into consideration in the revised draft now presented to the Scientific Council at this 46th Session. Following this discussion the final document will be presented for adoption to the Governing Council at its 52nd Session in May 2010.

33. The Director looks forward to the Scientific Council's discussion of the IARC Medium-Term Strategy and Implementation Plan (2010–2014) (see document SC/46/7).

Concluding remarks

34. The Director thanks the Scientific Council for its rigour and its positive approach to the work of the Agency. In particular the Director thanks the previous Chair, Professor Siemiatycki, and the current Chair, Dr Comber, of the Scientific Council and the Chair of the Governing Council, Professor Hanssen, for their support and guidance during the transition period and his first year in office.

* Please note that the Working Group Report is available upon request.

Annex 1

IARC Senior Leadership Team Terms of Reference

The IARC Senior Leadership Team (SLT) is the highest level committee of the Agency. The SLT is a consultative body for the Director and is responsible for advising him or her on matters of overall strategy, in particular the scientific direction of the Agency. In statutory terms, the Director has overall management responsibility and thus all recommendations of the SLT are submitted to the Director for decision.

The duties of the Senior Leadership Team are:

- To contribute to the strategic direction of the Agency for presentation by the Director to the Scientific and Governing Councils
- To oversee the progress of the Agency in light of its research strategy, including the development and monitoring of key performance indicators
- To advise on the case for major new strategic initiatives and senior appointments across all Sections and Groups and to help ensure that these support the Agency strategy
- To ensure that the Agency benefits from efficient and effective support services to meet all its needs through its dealings with the IARC Operational Team within the confines of WHO/IARC rules and regulations
- To oversee the development and implementation of occupational health and safety policies
- To consider the Agency committee structures and to help formulate the terms of reference for those committees
- To ensure that Agency staff are aware of and have an opportunity to bring ideas via Section Heads to the Senior Leadership Team
- To contribute to the formulation of the IARC biennial budget
- To assist the Agency in communicating its activities effectively to its various stakeholders
- To make available Minutes of its meetings on the IARC intranet

Membership

The Senior Leadership Team's membership will be as follows:

- Director (DIR)
- Director of Administration and Finance (DAF)
- All Heads of Section
- Head of Communications (COM)

The team will meet on a monthly basis. The Team will be chaired by the Director and supported by his/her personal assistant. As SLT members are present to corporately advise on Agency strategy and to review activities, no deputy is required upon absence of an SLT member.