

**DIRECTOR'S RESPONSE TO
THE SECTION OF INFECTIONS (INF) REVIEW
HELD AT IARC IN NOVEMBER 2009**

1. The Director notes with satisfaction the high overall evaluation assigned to the Section of Infections (INF) and to both of its Groups, the Infections and Cancer Epidemiology Group (ICE) led by Dr Silvia Franceschi and the Infections and Cancer Biology Group (ICB) led by Dr Massimo Tommasino.
2. The Scientific Council strongly supported the conclusions in the Report from the Review Panel (Document SC/46/WP4) and the recommendation that the Section be adequately supported for their ongoing work. The Director confirmed that this was his intention within the constraints faced in general across the Agency.
3. The work of ICB relies on adequate laboratory equipment and infrastructure; the Group is benefitting generally from the additional investment in this area including the acquisition of the Luminex apparatus and, in future, will benefit from the purchase of next generation DNA sequencing equipment.
4. In relation to scientific direction, as recommended by the peer-review panel, the ICB Group will focus its efforts on HPV oncogenic mechanisms rather than on the identification of novel oncogenic pathogens. In terms of collaboration, ICB has coordinated the submission of a major grant application to the European Union to study the role of HPV in head and neck cancer in Europe and India; this application involves collaboration with the Sections of Early Detection and Prevention (EDP) and Genetics (GEN).
5. The absence of technical staff funded on the regular budget was recognized as a threat to the success of ICB. The retirement of a senior technician in November 2009 had provided an opportunity to create two new junior professional scientist posts (P1 grade) in the Group. This secured the appointment of two of the scientists who provide the necessary support and supervision to post-doctoral fellows and students in the Group.
6. Following the peer-review, additional technical support (an LY3 and LY4 post) has been proposed for ICB in the budget for 2012–2013. This will be partially funded by the retirement of a P4 grade scientist from ICB. In the short-term the reassignment of an LY4 grade technician to the Group has provided additional resources.

7. Additional funds were made available for the temporary appointment of a scientist (P1 grade) allowing Dr Sylla to contribute to the Agency's research and training initiatives on cancer in Africa, in cooperation with the African Organization for Research and Training in Cancer (AORTIC).
8. The ICE Group identified the need for additional support to data management, and funds were identified to create a post (LY4 grade) on the regular budget. This will help the Group to update and use the large datasets available at ICE, mainly on HPV, HIV, and the real-time location of biological samples.
9. The panel's recommendation to identify additional sources of extrabudgetary funding for ICE was noted. Initiatives included the submission in July of a project entitled "Study of the role of Human Papillomavirus testing in women with HIV in Africa" to the *Fondation de France* (Paris) and the preparation of two grant proposals for NIH/NCI on the identification of biomarkers for cervical intra-epithelial neoplasia grade 2 or worse (i.e. distinction of women with benign HPV infection from those requiring more intense monitoring) and on cancer excess in HIV-infected individuals. Unfortunately, some grant proposals submitted earlier to NIH/NCI and French funding agencies (INCa, FiNOVI, and ANRS) were not successful.
10. Regarding the development of collaborations within the Agency, the ICE Group is currently working with: 1) the Section of Nutrition and Metabolism (NME) on hepatitis viruses and risk of lymphoid-tissue cancers, and on the role of female hormones in cancer of the cervix uteri and thyroid in the framework of the EPIC Prospective Study; and 2) the Section of Genetics (GEN) on the interaction between HPV infection and susceptibility genes on the risk of cancer of the mouth and pharynx. The collaboration with ICB on HPV 16 variants and cervical cancer risk has been expanded to include two prospective studies of HPV-positive women in Italy and France.
11. In relation to the training of graduate students, a PhD student (an MD) has joined ICE and will carry out a project focusing on HPV-related studies. In addition, ICE hosted two Senior Visiting Scientists in 2010 and plans to host another in 2011.
12. The peer-review panel noted that the Agency did not allow the naming of non-permanent staff on research grants submitted for funding. This has since been addressed and is now permitted. However, even though named on the grant, the scientist concerned would have to proceed through the normal IARC competitive selection process for advertised posts on extrabudgetary funds.
13. The generic post-doctoral training being developed through the Education and Training Group (see document SC/46/8) is providing a more structured training environment for the young scientists across the Agency.