

The European Brain Council's Weekly External Environment Update

Week of 17th October 2011

Quote of the week

"Our findings suggest that it is not only genetic variations that are important...the epigenetic differences we see may tell us more about the causes of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, as some alterations were specific to either disease."

Dr Jonathan Mill of the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London, commenting on the first comprehensive analysis of disease-associated deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) methylation differences in twins discordant for schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, see articles of interest for further details

Agenda Watch

- i) Please click [here](#) to access the draft agenda of the Working Party on Public Health that will take place on October 21st

Institution Watch

- ii) On 11th October, the Polish presidency held a conference in Warsaw on the pharmaceutical industry and innovation in the area of generic drugs. The outcome of the conference will be highlighted in due course

Key updates this week

European Medicines Agency releases qualification opinion on diagnosis of pre-dementia Alzheimer's for public consultation

The European Medicines Agency is seeking opinions from the public on a [qualification opinion](#) describing a biomarker to help identify patients who can be recruited for clinical trials of treatments for early Alzheimer's disease.

The draft opinion highlights that patients with a low hippocampus volume (the region of the brain involved in memory, shown via magnetic resonance imaging or an MRI scan) together with cognitive deficit (problems with the thought process) may be in the pre-dementia stage of Alzheimer's disease. Subsequently, these patients may qualify for inclusion within clinical trials of medicines that could slow the development of dementia. The opinion, which was developed in co-operation with the [Critical Path Institute](#), is open for comments until 1st November 2011. Please click [here](#) for more information.

Presentation of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing given at the 14th European Health Forum Gastein

Please click [here](#) to access the Presentation of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing given at the 14th European Health Forum Gastein, between 5th and 8th October 2011.

ERC helps innovative projects to bring good ideas to market

The European Research Council (ERC) has today announced the first results of its new funding initiative, the **Proof of Concept**. These "top up" grants, worth up to €150,000 each, are designed to help ERC-funded "blue sky" research maximise its value. In total, 30 top researchers already receiving ERC grants will be able to bridge the gap between their research and the earliest stages of a marketable innovation. Using a very limited part of the whole ERC budget, the initiative is designed to unleash considerable innovation potential.

Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science, Máire Geoghegan-Quinn, said: "In this time of economic crisis, investing in excellence and innovation in Europe is vital. This targeted backing can help high potential ERC projects capture the maximum value from frontier research. We need to stimulate innovation and bring more ideas to market."

For more information, please click [here](#) .

Commission decision on the awarding of grants for proposals for 2011 under the second Health Programme

Please click [here](#) to access the **Commission decision on the awarding of grants for proposals for 2011 under the second Health Programme (2008-2013)**

Answer to written question on Bad-memory removal genes

Oreste Rossi (EFD) recently questioned the European Commission about claims by Australian researchers that a DNA molecule, mir-128b, can temporarily banish the memories associated with a bad event. The Australian researchers claim that using this DNA molecule would have positive effects because it only acts at the juncture in which the memory associated with a negative event reoccurs, and mitigates it. Rossi asked if the Commission will look at these research findings with a view to potentially placing a drug containing the molecule on the market.

Máire Geoghegan-Quinn stated that although the Commission is aware of this research, as well as various investigations surrounding the molecular processes that underlie fear extinction in the hope of successfully treating anxiety and stress disorders, the results generated to date are not conclusive. However, the Commission is supporting research on the mechanisms of memory loss and memory formation through its Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7, 2007–2013).

Meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Carers

On 11th October, Neelie Kroes, Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for the Digital Agenda, addressed the meeting of the European Parliament Interest Group on Carers and highlighted the productivity challenge for the health and social care sector arising from the changing dependency ratio.

Addressing this requires innovation, claims Kroes, in terms of upgrading workforce skills and utilising proven technology. Effective use of ICT in particular provides a vital tool for service users in terms of maintaining independence, as well as for carers, whose administrative activity can be reduced in order to focus on face to face time with patients.

Uptake and scaling of ICT-based services is more successful in countries with national or regional programs for carers, for example in Spain, Finland or Sweden. Countries where sudden policy changes result in scaling back on ICT services within the social care sector fare less well, hence the existence of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing, which aims to identify areas where innovation and ICT could have a greater impact where specific barriers have so far prevented large scale introduction across Europe.

The resulting **Strategic Implementation Plan**, due out in November, will present proposed actions in order to start addressing this. Please see future updates for more details.

Articles of interest

- ✓ *Cordis News*, Epigenetic impact on neuropsychiatric disorders

http://cordis.europa.eu/fetch?CALLER=EN_NEWS&ACTION=D&SESSION=&RCN=33922

- ✓ *Guardian online*, Sleights of hand, sleights of mind

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/neurophilosophy/2011/oct/14/1?newsfeed=true>

Dates for your diary

- ✓ EBC Board Meeting November, Warsaw, November 17th 2011
- ✓ EBC Polish Presidency Meeting, Warsaw, November 18th 2011