

**Speech by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn Commissioner for Research, Innovation and Science**  
**Brain Research: Speech by Máire Geoghegan-Quinn at Hungarian Academy of Sciences**

Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest  
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Minister Cséfalvay, Professor Pálincas,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Hungarian Presidency for inviting me to open this conference on "Discovery research in neuropsychiatry: depression, anxiety and schizophrenia in focus". Congratulations also to the President of the Conference, Professor Freund for bringing together this group of high-level and distinguished participants.

How we deal with and treat public mental health issues is at the top of the European research agenda, and deservedly so. The high level of participation at this Presidency conference, focusing on three neuropsychiatric disorders, demonstrates that mental health is recognised as an important public health issue at the highest European level.

We are all aware that the number of diagnosed mental disorders is steadily increasing across the EU. Perhaps this is not a coincidence given the ever-increasing complexity of contemporary life, the increasing atomisation of our society, and in recent years in many countries, social and economic difficulties that create stress for millions of people.

A recent European study of the situation in six Member States found that at any one time around 15% of women and 8% of men of adult age suffer from some form of mental illness. According to the World Health Organisation, mental health problems already form the biggest share of disorders in several of our Member States. And another survey reveals that some 27% of people in the EU between 18 and 65 years of age were affected by at least one mental disorder in the previous 12 months. These are worrying facts that warrant our serious attention.

We need to tackle these problems head-on, making the best possible use of our financial and human resources, our knowledge and our skills if we are to make inroads into these sobering figures. It will take the dedication of our best policy-makers, high quality research and reformed social and medical infrastructures if we are to really address the challenges posed by depression, anxiety and schizophrenia.

Tackling our most pressing societal challenges is the key objective of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU's political and economic blueprint for the next decade. And we must all be on board to tackle such major challenges – so I mean medical professionals, researchers, policymakers, NGOs and most importantly, patients and their families and carers must work together to address these real and serious challenges.

The Europe 2020 Strategy is designed to turn Europe into a smart, sustainable and socially inclusive market economy. It is a dynamic roadmap - a call to action that will help Europe find its way out of the recent economic crisis, get people back to work, and find answers to societal challenges such as climate change, energy security, better public health and coping with our ageing population. Research, innovation and science are right at its heart.

Many of these challenges also correspond to major market opportunities that can best be seized with a coordinated approach at European level, from essential blue-sky research leading all the way to new products or services that reach the market. Indeed, according

to economists, reaching the target of investing 3% of GDP in Research and Development could create more than three million jobs and increase annual GDP by €700 billion by 2025. This target is reconfirmed in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The full impact of an Innovation Union is potentially even greater.

On 6 October last year the Commission adopted the Innovation Union Flagship initiative, one of the main pillars of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The Flagship contains a raft of bold and necessary actions and policies to transform Europe into an "Innovation Union". While R&D are clearly vital for many innovation activities, the Flagship promotes a broad concept of "innovation" that applies to business models, management structures and processes, the delivery of services by the public sector - including in health and medicine - and social innovation.

The Innovation Union aims to couple excellent research with the innovation that Europe needs in so many areas. In the field of medicine, this means ensuring that we have the framework conditions necessary for the best research that will lead to the most useful innovations resulting in new medicines, treatments and therapies. In other words - research and innovation that will improve the lives of ordinary people. Among the 34 detailed commitments contained in the Innovation Union Flagship, there are two initiatives that I would like to mention in particular. The first is completion of the European Research Area - the ERA.

Despite some progress in recent years, the overall push to complete the European Research Area remains slow. We are committed to creating a genuine European Research Area, where researchers can move freely from country to country, between private sector and public sector and back again, and from discipline to discipline.

Fragmentation of national research efforts has been a problem until now. We want to solve that, finding the right balance between competition that ensures research excellence, and cooperation which ensures critical mass and impact. So, next year we will propose an ERA legislative framework and supporting measures to remove the remaining obstacles to mobility, to foster greater coherence between European and national research policies and to boost cross-border research co-operation.

The second initiative I want to highlight is in many ways the centrepiece of the Innovation Union. We propose to set up a small number of targeted European Innovation Partnerships in areas where clear and measurable goals can be defined and that have a direct link to a societal challenge. Each Partnership will provide a framework for bringing together the stakeholders involved, and will weave together all of the relevant instruments already in place.

A key selection criterion for partnerships is the potential for Europe to remain or become a market leader. The pilot Innovation Partnership on "Active and Healthy Ageing" is currently being set up. Its goal is to add two healthy years to the lives of older people. This Partnership is of course highly relevant to mental illness and mental disorders, as preserving and fostering good mental health is vital for healthy ageing and for preventing other chronic diseases.

There are, of course other, more established ways in which we support research on mental health and mental disorders at European level. Such research has been an integral part of the EU Framework Programmes for more than 20 years.

The Seventh Framework Programme for Research - better known perhaps as FP7 - takes account of the global burden of mental health disorders by taking a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach across the different research themes of Health, Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities, and Information and Communication Technology.

Significant investments are being made in this research. With a budget of 6.1 billion euro for the period 2007–2013, the Health theme represents almost 19% of the budget for collaborative research in FP7. This is a significant investment in improving the health of European citizens, and a significant investment in Europe's health-related industries and businesses.

In the last four years alone, the FP7 Health Programme has earmarked 167 million euro for biomedical and public health research on mental health disorders. About 35 million euro of this is being spent on schizophrenia research, 24 million on depression, and 6 million on anxiety and stress. Another 15 million euro is devoted to research on autism. This ranks brain disorders and mental health research in general, among the best-funded areas in FP7.

In addition, understanding the socio-economic background to these disorders is crucial to developing effective responses. Indeed, this is the case for so many of our societal challenges and a reason why socio-economic sciences and humanities are such a vital part of European research funding. Complementary actions relevant to mental health and well-being on issues such as social cohesion and inclusion, monitoring and adapting to demographic change, social trends and lifestyles, are covered by FP7's theme on Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities.

So, what are we getting for our money?

I'd like to give you just a few examples of the kind of large-scale research projects we have been able to finance, which I think best illustrate the added value of combining our research forces at European level.

FP7 has supported two large integrated projects, "EU-GEI" and "OPTIMISE", which are now combined in a common European network to create a 23 million euro "Schizophrenia Platform". The platform aims to identify the interactive genetic, clinical and environmental determinants that are involved in the development, severity and outcome of schizophrenia. The overall goal of the Platform is to see the best possible management and treatment of schizophrenia in Europe.

Another example is the 10 million euro in support awarded to the research project on depression called "MOODINFLAME". This project is testing the concept that major mood disorders are the result of a systemic and abnormal condition where the patient is prone to inflammation of the brain. These large-scale and important research actions, and many others besides, are fully in line with the five priority areas identified in the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being.

In addition, last May the European Commission hosted a workshop in Brussels to discuss how to structure mental health research in Europe. A project to develop a roadmap for mental health research in Europe has been selected for funding and is currently in negotiation with my services in the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation.

Mental health research is also supported under FP7 by the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI), a public-private partnership between the European Commission and the member companies of the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA).

The IMI aims to modernise the drug development process by providing new tools and methodologies for the development of safer and more efficient medicines. This initiative supports collaboration between several large pharmaceutical players, academics, SMEs, patient organisations, and regulatory authorities around specific research projects carried out in Europe. One such project, NEWMEDS, focuses on depression and schizophrenia. As regards schizophrenia, the participating pharmaceutical companies have generated a database bringing together a huge amount of data from 67 trials in

over 25 countries. Such an extensive database will enable future clinical trials to be smaller and quicker, and will reduce the patients' exposure to experimental medications.

NEWMEDS also pools the resources of several public sector projects with trials from three pharmaceutical companies on the genetics and clinical response of over 1800 patients suffering from depression. Such a sample is expected to be big enough to address how genetics influence antidepressant response, which could lead to changes in the way patients are selected for trials and how treatments are chosen for individuals.

The strength of the Innovative Medicines Initiative lies in the pooling of resources and expertise from different stakeholders to address specific and well-focused scientific challenges. This is the kind of approach that the Innovation Union encourages. The Innovative Medicines Initiative is living up to its name. I have confidence that with the commitment of the scientific community, it will help reverse the worrying trend in the pharmaceutical industry that has seen a lot of research move out of Europe in recent years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All of these complementary initiatives, and others that I have not had time to mention, are part of a coherent and ambitious strategy addressing the whole spectrum of mental health research, as well as education and training.

One fundamental message of Innovation Union is that Europe's economic and societal challenges are much too big for "business as usual". I am convinced that it is only through supporting innovation and research and by encouraging all stakeholders to work together that we will be able to achieve our twin aims – overcoming societal challenges and supporting European growth and competitiveness.

We need to work together across silos and across disciplines. And, mindful that working outside of silos stimulates excellence and innovation, I would ask you to keep the multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral nature of mental health issues at the forefront of your minds during your two days of workshops and discussions.

The challenges are great and of course our task goes beyond merely funding mental health research. Good mental health and well-being is the foundation of a successful society. It is a prerequisite for Europe's sustainable success, and new medicines and treatments can not only alleviate personal suffering, they can contribute to creating jobs and growth in Europe.

I quoted some statistics at the start of my speech. You, no doubt, will have many other statistics at your fingertips that attempt to quantify the public health challenge posed by mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. But such statistics represent a great deal of personal illness, isolation and social exclusion for millions of Europeans. In many countries there are still taboos around a frank and open discussion on mental health issues.

That is certainly not the case at this conference. You are some of Europe's top researchers, mental health practitioners and policy-makers. You also represent the sufferers and their families. You deal with these important and complex issues every day.

Ultimately your work at this conference, and in the rest of your professional lives, is about trying to make Europeans happier - trying to give them better lives. You have my unwavering support and sincere admiration for your work in tackling this most fundamental of challenges in our society. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your work after this conference.