

Centro de Investigación Biomédica en Red de Salud Mental (CIBERSAM)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Increased international collaboration for mental health research

Sant Boi de Llobregat (Barcelona), Spain - July 5, 2013

- ◆ In a meeting in Brussels on June 20th, EC officers and European national representatives from policy-making and research funding agencies supported a tighter collaboration between EU member states for the coordination of national mental health research programmes.
- ◆ Dr. Bruce Cuthbert, director of translational research in NIMH, also expressed his willingness to establish a transatlantic collaboration.
- ◆ A representative group will be created to work on increasing collaboration.
- ◆ The ROAMER project, funded by the European Commission, hosted the meeting. ROAMER will develop a mental health research roadmap in Europe to bridge the gap between European mental health needs and the services to meet them.
- ◆ The percentage of the overall budget dedicated to mental health research in EU member states is much lower than the impact of these disorders on health. Not only are research resources scarce and insufficient, but there is limited coordination of approaches to mental disorder and mental health services research across Europe.
- ◆ Up to the age 65, roughly 50% of the EU population will have been affected by mental disorders at some point in their life.
- ◆ Suicide is the leading cause of unnatural mortality across the European Union, even surpassing traffic accidents. Importantly, nine of the ten countries with the highest rates of suicide in the world are in Europe.

In the framework of the ROAMER project, a relevant group of **EC officers and European national representatives of policy-makers and funding agencies** (ROAMER's Government and Funding Institution Council) met on June 20th in Brussels to discuss the needs for mental health research in Europe and to explore the possibility of a tight collaboration between EU member states to **coordinate national and international mental health research programmes**.



Researchers, EC officers and representatives from policy-making and research funding agencies during the meeting in Brussels.

Dr. Bruce Cuthbert, director of translational research in the **National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH)** of the United States of America, also joined the meeting to explain their research policy funding and expressed their willingness to **cooperate with the EU and ROAMER** in this absolutely necessary process, thus initiating a promising transatlantic collaboration.

Nine of the ten countries with the highest rates of suicide in the world are in Europe (WHO). Indeed, **suicide is the leading cause of unnatural mortality across the European Union**, even surpassing traffic accidents. Mental disorders account for almost one third of the total disease burden for non-communicable diseases in Europe, with depression alone being the largest component of the total burden. Estimations of experts indicate that up to the age 65, **roughly 50% of the European Union population will have been affected by mental disorders at some point in their life**. Actually, mental

disorders affect 38 out of 100 Europeans every year, what translates into 164.8 million of persons and accounts for severe socio-economic costs. The **total cost of brain disorders in Europe** was estimated at **€798 billion in 2010**, thus being their average European per capita cost of €1550. Top it off, the already high burden and impact of mental disorders is expected to rise.

Policies that aim to reduce the impact of mental disorders in Europe will not be optimally effective if we do not increase our knowledge of their determinants, on how to prevent them, and on how to improve the efficacy, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of interventions and their translation into clinical practice. Unfortunately, **mental health research is less funded and more fragmented than other research areas in the EU**. When compared with USA, the percentage of the overall budget dedicated to research on mental disorders in EU countries is less than half. This 'historically low level of funding' in Europe is inefficient given the substantial benefit that this research could provide. Not only are research resources comparatively small at a national level, but there has been **limited European coordination of approaches to mental disorder and mental health services research**. Therefore, there still remains a substantial **gap between European mental health needs and the services to meet them**, even when Europe has one of the highest levels of resources for mental health care.

Reactive, partial, and very focused research initiatives are not the solution. The gap can only be properly identified, its causes determined and addressed in light of the results of comprehensive and integrated mental health research, well-funded, orientated to potential shifts in future needs and specifically addressing a pragmatic and integrated approach to a pan-European strategy. **What is really needed is a coordinated strategy based on a clear perception of the breadth and diversity of mental health research in Europe**.

In this context, **the ROAMER project**, coordinated by Dr. Josep Maria Haro (CIBERSAM) and funded by the European Commission under FP7 programme (FP7-HEALTH-2011/No. 282586), was launched in October 2011 to **develop an effective and widely accepted roadmap for the promotion and integration of mental health and well-being research across Europe**. To this end, ROAMER counts with three years of time and a budget of €2 million, and combines a consortium of **European mental health research scientists**, with a **methodologically sound, pragmatic, and comprehensive approach**, and an **extensive stakeholder involvement including users, family members, carers, clinicians, and policy-makers**. The roadmap is being built upon existing state-of-the-art, thoroughly analysed by experts during the first stage, and aimed to priority setting across Europe, focusing on high quality scientific research and taking into account the priorities set out in the European Parliament Resolution, namely "*prevention, early detection, intervention and treatment of mental disorders*". It will **cover the major areas of mental health and wellbeing research** (i.e. biological, psychological, epidemiological, clinical, public health, social and economic aspects), along with research infrastructures, capacity building initiatives and funding programs. The roadmap, that is going to be presented to the European Commission around September 2014, will ultimately be **translated into improvements and innovations in mental health care delivery and in strategies to increase the mental health and wellbeing of the European population in a time frame of 10 years**.

CIBERSAM, the partner coordinating the ROAMER project, is a research consortium funded on 2008 by the Spanish Ministry of Science whose mission is to carry out and promote research on mental health, in order to improve clinical care and mental health in the society through the knowledge generated by translational research in psychiatry and neuroscience. It includes 26 clinical and basic research groups that cover all areas of mental health and who have been selected for their excellence.

(1072 words // 1053 words)

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