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European Network of Centres for Pharmacoepidemiology and Pharmacovigilance

Meeting Report – ENCePP Plenary Meeting

8 June 2010 – chaired by Peter Arlett

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1. General Matters

1.1. Welcome and introductory remarks

This first Plenary meeting of 2010 was opened by Noël Wathion, Head of Unit, Patient Health Protection. On behalf of the Agency he welcomed all delegates, including observers from Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Turkey and Japan.

He briefly touched on some highlights, in particular the establishment of the ENCePP Steering Group (SG) following the first ever SG election held at the Plenary in December 2009. The SG started its tenure with an inaugural meeting in February of this year, and has met twice more since. The minutes of these meetings are published on the ENCePP website.

The Steering Group has identified some key topics for the future direction of ENCePP:

- Strategy – safety issues in Europe
  - Funding of academic research / independent studies
  - Regulatory interface with ENCePP study requirements
- Repository of Investigators' Declarations of Interest
- Dialogue with medical journals
- Data privacy & protection
- Evaluation of added value of the ENCePP study concept compared to the added bureaucratic burden (performance measures); measures of success of ENCePP; quality evaluation & assurance
- Audit/appeals/ "policing" of ENCePP studies

The current mandates of the ENCePP Working Groups are currently under review in light of these topics. Additionally, the SG has proposed the establishment of one - or possibly two - new Working Groups, one on 'communication' and one on 'compliance monitoring'.

The electronic inventory of research centres and networks was launched in January 2010, followed by the "data sources" module in May. The Agency considers this database a key resource for building capacity for research in the EU.

Following a public consultation of the ENCePP Code of conduct and the Checklist of Methodological Standards, the documents have been revised and adopted by the SG. These are two of the corner stones for the ENCePP Study concept which will be officially launched at this meeting.

Finally, Noël Wathion informed the Plenary that 2010 has been earmarked in the Agency's work programme as the year for promoting ENCePP, and a number of activities are planned in this context. One milestone will be the ENCePP Info Day on 26 November 2010 which is being organised in cooperation with DIA in London.

1.2. Adoption of agenda

Peter Arlett, the Chair of the meeting, started by adding his welcome to the large number of centres, networks and data sources represented at the Plenary, and thanked them for having made the effort of registering in the ENCePP database of research resources. He reminded everybody that registration is a prerequisite for being invited to the Plenary, although registration also serves as an avenue for advertising ones services.

He informed the Plenary that it had been decided not to provide any paper copies of presentations at the current meeting, but that these would be published on the ENCePP website, together with the meeting report.

The Chair briefly introduced the agenda of the meeting, with the morning session focussing particularly on the outcome of the SG meetings, and to focus on the concept of ENCePP studies. The afternoon session would be dedicated to sharing experiences of networks and capacity building.

The agenda was adopted without comments.

2. Report from Steering Group

Ingemar Persson, Vice-Chair of the ENCePP Steering Group, presented a report from the SG, including its role, composition, milestones and achievements so far.

Following the presentation one of the delegates queried whether the SG had also considered environmental safety issues during its discussions on the prioritisation of key topics.

Although this subject has not yet been approached in detail by the SG, the Chair agreed that this was an important issue and that the environmental impact of medicines could be part of the strategic discussions for ENCePP and could be addressed either at Working Group or SG level in the near future.

3. Launch of ENCePP Studies

3.1. The ENCePP Study Concept

Peter Arlett opened this session by introducing the “ENCePP Study Info Pack” which had been made available to each delegate. The pack contained a fact sheet with background information and explanation of the concept, a copy of the ENCePP Code of Conduct, the Checklist of Methodological Standards for ENCePP Study Protocols, and a copy of the Questionnaire linked to the interim solution devised for registering ENCePP studies. He explained that a new section on the ENCePP website containing the exact same information would be launched to the public on 10 June 2010.

He also emphasised in this context that the SG had agreed to review the code in light of the experience gained with the ENCePP studies in one year or after registration of 15 studies, whichever comes first.

3.2. ENCePP Code of Conduct

Stefanie Prilla presented on the ENCePP Code of Conduct which included a brief history of the document, an overview of the outcome of the public consultation, changes implemented and next steps. She invited all delegates to submit any comments they may have to be taken into account at the time of the first revision of the code.

She informed the Plenary that additional information on the public consultation will be published on the ENCePP website shortly; this will include a summary of the main comments received with a rationale for their (non)acceptance. In addition, a question & answer document will be prepared to address

common questions and support the understanding of the ENCePP study concept and the provisions of the Code.

Furthermore, the presentation highlighted the main principles underpinning the Code, i.e. transparency, best practice in the interaction between researchers and study funders, and scientific independence. The rest of the presentation dealt with the scope of the code and the main changes to the document following the public consultation.

During the discussion that followed the importance of a close dialogue with medical journals was highlighted, and the Chair noted that the SG was in complete agreement and that this issue would be followed up as one of the key topics for the future.

The question was raised whether the SG had already considered complementing the Code by drafting additional topic-specific documents including a separate position paper or guidance dealing with intellectual property rights and data protection. It was also noted that currently the definition of "conflict of interest" only focuses on the investigator. However, it might be useful to have a framework in place to also address independent decision making by regulators who might also be involved in research projects. Peter Arlett said that these suggestions would be discussed at the next Steering Group meeting.

A central topic of the discussion was the potential issues in relation to the Code's provision of making available - on request - the analytical data set. Some participants voiced their concern that in some cases of database studies, access to data is subject to a licence or otherwise restricted due to data protection, which would be in conflict with the above-mentioned provision. The Plenary was informed that the provision only relates to the final data set used for analysis, i.e. aggregated data, while for raw data the Code only specifies that investigators should ensure an audit trail.

Some delegates also raised their concern over potential misuse of publicly available information and how it is intended to regulate this. Similarly, external requests for access to data and information should be regulated in a way to only allow for requests based on valid reasons and maybe even requiring an administrative charge. It was noted that the workload related to external requests for access to data could potentially be rather high. The Chair confirmed that possible misuse will be looked at during the foreseen review of the Code of Conduct in light of the experience gained with the ENCePP Studies. He also reminded everybody that the current concept is built on the principles of self declaration and honesty. The issue of 'policing' was raised and will be put as a question to a working group for consideration in a more structured way.

In an effort to address the concerns of ENCePP partners, Peter Arlett suggested that any requests for access to data should be channelled via the ENCePP secretariat, who would consult the ENCePP SG. This will be made explicit on the ENCePP website.

It was agreed to go ahead with the publication of Code of Conduct later this week. However, in parallel, a TC of the Steering Group will be called as a matter of urgency to consider the issues raised at the Plenary and in particular those concerning access to study data. One possible solution could be that all requests for access to data are channelled through the SG to judge against certain criteria. This could act as a filter mechanism to prevent the abuse of data and prevent unnecessary burden on researchers. No objections were raised from the Plenary against putting these issues to the SG.

3.3. Checklist of Methodological Standards for ENCePP Study Protocols

Xavier Kurz briefly introduced the checklist as adopted by the SG on 19/3/2010. He underlined that, at this stage, the information provided in the form was not being verified, but that the purpose of the checklist was to stimulate compliance with main methodological principles when designing a protocol.

The submission of the completed checklist is one of the 'CoRe requirements' when applying for the ENCEPP seal.

Xavier confirmed that, as with the Code of Conduct, a review of the checklist is foreseen in one year's time.

3.4. Register of Studies

Rocio Fernandez gave a short presentation on the current status of the development of the electronic register of studies and a description of the data fields of the data entry form, followed by a presentation from Camilla Smeraldi on the interim solution for the registration of ENCePP studies that has been put in place pending the launch of the e-register. Camilla provided a step-by-step explanation of the procedure and highlighted that the data entry form provided in the information pack (and also available for download on the ENCePP website) is identical to the electronic data fields contained in the database to be launched later this year.

Although partners are encouraged to test the concept against ongoing studies, it was emphasised that formal registration can only be prospective.

3.5. Second release of ENCePP database of research resources

Stefanie Prilla provided an explanation of the additional functions available following the second release of the ENCePP Database of Research Resources, which now also includes the Registry of EU Data Sources.

The Agency is aware of the occasional slow response of the system and is monitoring the situation.

3.6. ENCePP Partner Forum

Dagmar Vogl briefly introduced the recently launched ENCePP Partner Forum and explained its structure. ENCePP partners were encouraged to populate their section with pertinent information and discussion topics. Requests for additional categories and forums should be addressed to the ENCePP Secretariat.

4. Update on latest developments in ENCePP

4.1. Progress report: Guidance on methodological research standards

Susana Perez-Gutthann, Chair of ENCePP Working Group Subgroup "Guidances and Recommendations", provided a report on the meeting of the group which had taken place the previous afternoon. The meeting had been called to review a first draft of the document "ENCePP Guide on Methodological Standards in Pharmacoepidemiology". This document is a compilation of contributions by a number of authors who had volunteered to draft certain chapters of the Guide.

The first draft is nearly finished, with only three sections still to be received from the contributors. The deadline for the pending sections has been set for 15th July 2010. An additional meeting of the group will take place in September of this year; however, in the meantime, volunteers are being sought from among the Plenary to peer review the Guide. The following partners volunteered to act as peer reviewers:

1. Camilla Stephens
2. Corinne de Vries

3. Michael Theodorakis

4. Marie Christine Perault

Peter Arlett thanked the Working Group for the work done so far.

4.2. Report from Working Groups 2 and 3

On behalf of Helen Dolk, Chair of Working Group 2 and who was unable to attend the Plenary, Henry Fitt provided a brief status report on the work of Working Group 2. The Working Group has completed a large part of its mandate, chiefly the development of the Code of Conduct, and the provision of specifications for the development of the e-register of studies. However, some points from the existing mandate remain pending and the SG considers that the following key issues identified could fit into this working group's remit:

- Development of a repository of Declarations of Interest
- Strategy – safety issues in Europe
- audit/appeals/'policing'

Alternatively setting up a new working group "Compliance monitoring" should be considered.

Helen Dolk has kindly agreed to continue chairing this working group. The ENCePP Secretariat will discuss with her whether these new issues should be taken on by this WG or if a new group should be established and will report the outcome to the Plenary.

At this stage the possibility to set up a new working group on "Communication" was raised. This suggestion by the Steering Group is based on the fact that ENCePP needs to communicate its messages better and in a more effective way.

Peter Arlett announced that a list would be circulated during the afternoon session, asking for volunteers to sign up and join individual working groups. Anybody interested in acting as chair of the possible new group 'Communication' should indicate this to the ENCePP Secretariat.

Miriam Sturkenboom, Chair of Working Group 3, gave an update on the group's work, during which she encouraged data source holders and networks to register in the ENCePP database of research resources.

She also urged the Plenary to share with the working group documents on ethical and data privacy issues that can be used to inform discussion on the use of data in multi-country studies. She also invited new members to join the WG (especially if participating in multi-country DB studies).

In conclusion, Peter Arlett thanked the working groups for all their hard work and for the significant contribution they made to the projects assigned. He also confirmed that Working Group 4 "Inventory of Centres" had fulfilled its mandate by delivering the data entry form relating to centres and networks. He thanked all involved in WG4 and in particular its chair, Mary Teeling, for their efforts.

4.3. Working Groups and mandates

This point was addressed under the previous agenda item and it was felt that no separate discussion was necessary.

5. Update on A/H1N1 Research Activities

5.1. Update on the European strategy for influenza A/H1N1 vaccines benefit/risk monitoring

5.2. Observed to expected analyses: lesson from an Expert group meeting

Xavier Kurz provided an update on the Agency's activities on vaccine safety surveillance and a report on lessons learned from Influenza A(H1N1) vaccines benefit-risk monitoring.

In conclusion of his presentation, Xavier announced that a restricted invitation to tender will soon be launched by the Agency, following the call for expressions of interest (CEI) published in July 2009. He noted the relative lack of responses of ENCePP centres to the CEI, which has resulted in a rather short list of applicants. He encouraged centres to apply as soon as possible; the deadline for applications is 30 April 2012.

Peter Arlett announced that the information on the call will be re-circulated to centres. He thanked Xavier for his hard work on the pandemic and all ENCePP partners who contributed to the benefit-risk monitoring exercise.

6. Networking

This session was aimed at presenting to the Plenary experiences from different networks, challenges faced, lessons learned and value added.

6.1. EuADR / SOS / ARITMO / VAESCO

Miriam Sturkenboom, Department of Medical Informatics and Epidemiology & Biostatistics Erasmus University Medical Center, presented on networking in drug and vaccine safety research: challenges, added value.

6.2. D:A:D Collaboration

Signe Worm from the Copenhagen HIV Programme (CHIP) at the University of Copenhagen presented on "the D:A:D Study: Data collection on adverse events of anti-HIV drugs".

6.3. EBMT

Alejandro Madrigal, President of the European Group for Blood and Marrow Transplantations presented on the EBMT network, its experiences and challenges.

7. Upcoming Events

EMA Scientific Debate:

Stella Blackburn briefly introduced the EMA Scientific Debate which will take place during the ICPE Congress in Brighton on 20 August 2010.

ENCePP Info Day:

Henry Fitt gave a short presentation on the ENCePP Info Day, which aims to promote ENCePP and is especially targeted at the pharmaceutical industry. The Info Day will take place on Friday, 26 November 2010 in London and is being organised by DIA.

Henry introduced the meeting format and the individual sessions and speakers. He expressed the Agency's hope that it will be a fruitful event and that many ENCePP partners will be able to attend the Info Day.

8. Summary of discussions & next steps

Finally, Peter Arlett introduced the design of the "ENCePP seal" which will be published on the ENCePP website and used in connection with ENCePP studies. He reiterated that this was a very important day for the Agency and ENCePP.

He once again thanked Miriam Sturkenboom, Signe Worm, Alejandro Madrigal and Xavier Kurz for their very interesting presentations on networking.

He thanked the volunteers for their interest in joining the various working groups. The new working group structure will be taken forward.

He thanked all delegates for their participation and ongoing support and encouraged all partners to go forth and do ENCePP studies.

9. A.O.B.

None.

Encl:

Presentations (see hyperlinks in text)