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RARE DISEASES IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC
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ORPHANET – INFORMATION, EDUCATION AND EXPERT CENTRES FOR RARE DISEASES

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The paper briefly describes the role of Orphanet as an informational and educational source for rare diseases. Most attention is given to the Centres of Expertise and European Reference Networks. The authors suggest an easy procedure how to get the basic data about the readiness of the clinics to be recognised for Centres of Expertise at the national level. EUCERD recommendations on quality criteria for centres of expertise are introduced. The coordinators of the potential Centres of Expertise should be contacted and asked to fill in the questionnaire designed to check whether the centre matches the EUCERD recommendations or not. In order for the process to be transparent, the selection criteria of expert resources are listed on national website (www.orphanet.sk).
The analysis of the questionnaires has to be carried out at the national level, to map the basic data about the current status. One questionnaire per department or clinic shall be filled in order to allow the evaluation. Clinics will be divided in two groups the ones which achieved the threshold and could be recognised as Centres of Expertise at the National level and the ones which need to be further monitored to reach the threshold.

Keywords: *Orphanet - Slovakia - creation of Centres of Expertise*

Rare diseases (RDs) are a priority for action in the EC Public Health Program (2008-2013). A Communication of the European Commission, entitled "Rare Diseases: Europe's challenge" was adopted in November 2008 and followed by Recommendations from the Council in June 2009 (2009/C 151/02). These documents clearly stated the importance of providing accurate information on expert services on RD to all European citizens.

Orphanet

Orphanet, established as a free multilingual portal in 1997 by the French Ministry of Health and the INSERM, is mentioned in the 2009 Council Recommendation as a key element of any national plan or strategy in the field. A Joint Action "Orphanet Europe" was selected for funding in 2010 under the EU Health Program. The expected outcome is a common European RD portal providing European citizens with the information they need.

Orphanet – information and education

Orphanet is currently the number one international website dedicated to RDs in general and the only one providing an inventory of RDs and giving access to classifications of rare diseases and orphan drugs. It is the only project which establishes a link between diseases, textual information about them and appropriate services for patients, health professionals, and policy makers.

Orphanet´*s rare diseases encyclopaedia is* written by experts and peer-reviewed. It contains user friendly information on more than 6000 rare diseases in 6 languages including disease names, prevalence rates in the community, synonyms, general descriptions of the disorders, symptoms, causes, epidemiological data, preventive measures, standard treatments.

Orphanet runs a *database of orphan drugs* providing information on their stage of development and availability in EU countries, *lists of research projects* and clinical trials, and *list of registries and biobanks.*

Importantly, the Orphanet portal includes a *directory of professional services (centres of expertise - CE*) in 35 countries - specialized outpatient clinics, diagnostic laboratories and support groups in Europe. It is accessible in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. Customized websites at the national level in national languages are also available.

The directory of services is maintained by the central team, but data collection and validation is carried out by local teams at Member State levels, all of which use the same methodology and agreed quality criteria. All the collected data is validated by a scientific advisory board at the national level prior to publication on the website.

Scope of Centres of Expertise (CE) for rare diseases in European countries

The development of centres of expertise and European Reference Networks (ERN) in the field of rare diseases is encouraged in the Council Recommendation from June 2009 and most recently in the Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare (2011/24/EU) as a means of organizing care for thousands of heterogeneous RDs affecting scattered patient populations across Europe. The scope of CE in terms of disease coverage is an important issue, as the expectation is to provide CE for all RD patients' needs at the national level. Several countries have already identified existing expertise at the national level and/or established centres specialized in some RDs/groups of RDs which have proven to be very efficient in improving quality of care.

The Scientific Secretariat of the EUCERD examined the current scope of CE in countries where they exist and grouped them by medical area (Rodwell et al. 2012). Three or more Member States have designated centres for: juvenile arthritis/paediatric

rheumatological diseases, developmental anomalies and malformations/dysmorphology, hereditary cardiac diseases, dermatological diseases, epidermolysis bullosa, pituitary diseases or hypothalamic-hypophyseal diseases, lysosomal diseases, Prader-Willi syndrome, Fabry disease, mitochondrial diseases, haemophilia/constitutional bleeding disorders, mastocytosis, hereditary diseases of the metabolism, porphyrias, epilepsies, neuromuscular diseases, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, pulmonary diseases, severe pulmonary hypertension, cystic fibrosis, hereditary immune deficiencies, ophthalmological diseases, genetic kidney disease, craniofacial anomalies, neurofibromatosis, and Rendu-Osler disease.

On the basis of this experience, a consensus can be thus identified that centres are required for around 12 groups of RD, 30 subgroups, and 26 individual diseases where centres currently exist in two or more countries. Most of these groups of RDs fit into the traditional organization of healthcare by medical area. However some grouping outside of traditional medical specialties is necessary, e.g. diseases of connective tissue, rare bone diseases, neurofibromatosis, multimalformation syndromes with intellectual disability, mitochondrial diseases, lysosomal diseases, any multi-systemic complex disease, etc.

Recommendations on Quality Criteria for Centres of Expertise for Rare Diseases

In October, 2012 the *Recommendations on Quality Criteria for Centres of Expertise for Rare Diseases in Member States* were unanimously adopted by the European Union Committee of Experts on Rare Diseases (EUCERD, http://www.eucerd.eu/). In order to share knowledge and expertise more efficiently, the EUCERD recommendations seek to introduce harmonious standards of quality practices by elaborating criteria for the Member States to be incorporated into their process of designating Centres of Expertise.

Orphanet - how to assess Centres of Expertise?

In order for Orphanet to be in line with the EUCERD recommendations on quality criteria for centres of expertise when publishing lists of centres, the coordinators of the expert centres should be contacted and asked to fill in the questionnaire designed to check whether the centre matches the EUCERD recommendations or not (Table 1). In order for the process to be transparent, the selection criteria of expert resources are listed on the national website (www.orphanet.sk).

There are 13 questions (Table 1). It is mandatory that Question 1 ("*How many patients did you see with this disease or group of disease last year?"*), question 2 ("*Do you provide expert advice/second opinion to other clinicians (mail, telephone)?")* and question 8 ("*Does the centre publish peer reviewed publications?"*) are answered by the centre, as these questions truly address the real expertise of the centre. However, the threshold numbers and percentages have to be determined at the national level.

Of the other 10 questions, it is mandatory that a minimum number (proposed are four), are answered by the centres, in this case threshold numbers and percentages also have to be determined at the national level.

The analysis of the questionnaires has to be carried out at the national level, according to the minimum number of criteria to be fulfilled for a centre to be

considered expert enough. One questionnaire per clinic shall be sent in order to allow the evaluation.

Received questionnaires are to be sorted into two categories: a) the centres whose answers to those minimum defined number of questions are positive and matching the defined threshold numbers, and/or percentages will be considered as "fulfilling EUCERD Criteria". These centres will be kept in the database and a special pictogram will be added to indicate that they fulfil the criteria (for the time being); b) expert centres not fulfilling sufficient EUCERD criteria will be subject to quality control evaluation to confirm their relevancy.

Table 1. ACTIVITY OF THE EXPERT CENTRE FOR RARE DISEASES (RD)*

*A disease is considered to be rare when it affects less than 1 person in 2,000

1) **How many patients did you see with this disease or group of diseases last year?**
a) Total number of patients seen last year:
b) Number of new cases last year:
c) Percentage of patients from other regions of the country:
2) Percentage of patients from abroad:
3) **Do you provide expert advice/second opinion to other clinicians (mail, telephone)?**
Number of expert opinions given last year:
4) Is your centre multi-disciplinary − integrating medical, biological, paramedical, psychological and social needs (such as a rare disease board)?
Yes/No Please explain your answer:
5) **Does your centre organize collaborations to ensure the continuity of care between childhood, adolescence and adulthood, if this is relevant?**
Yes/No
6) **Does your centre have appropriate arrangements in place for referrals within your country and from/to other EU countries (if applicable)?**
Yes/No
7) **Does your centre have quality management procedure(s) in place to ensure quality of care (including National and/or European legal provisions), and does it participate in internal and external quality schemes, if applicable?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:
8) **Does the centre publish peer reviewed publications?**
Number of publications on the disease(s) over the past five years:
Number of communications on the disease(s) over the past five years: Yes/No
9) **Have you obtained grants for studies on this disease or group of diseases?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:

10) **Do you participate in systematic clinical data collection?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:
11) **Do you participate in clinical trials?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:
12) **Do you teach and train for this disease or group of diseases? Yes/No**
If yes, please describe:
13) **Do you have links and collaborations with patient organizations?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:
14) **Does the centre have links and collaborations with other centers at the national, European or international level?**
Yes/No If yes, please describe:

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ORPHANET – INFORMOVANOSŤ, VZDELÁVANIE A ŠPECIALIZOVANÉ CENTRÁ STAROSTLIVOSTI O PACIENTOV SO ZCH

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Práca stručne charakterizuje úlohu ORPHANETU ako významného vzdelávacieho a informačného portálu o zriedkavých chorobách. Najväčšia pozornosť je venovaná expertíznym centrám a Európskej referenčnej sieti. Autori navrhujú jednoduchý postup získania základných informácií o pripravenosti pracovísk pre získanie národného štatútu expertízneho centrá. Navrhujú osloviť koordinátorov potenciálnych expertíznych centier aby vyplnili dotazník vypracovaný podľa EUCERD kritérií. Pre transparentnosť procesu výberové kritériá pre expertízne centrá sú uvedené nanárodnej stránke ORPHANET (www.orphanet.sk).
Dotazníky sa budú analyzovať na národnej úrovni a prispejú k zmapovaniu aktuálnej situácie. Každé pracovisko vyplní len jeden dotazník. Pracoviská budú rozdelené do dvoch skupín na tie ktoré dosiahli potrebný počet bodov a možno im udeliť štatút expertízneho centra na národnej úrovni a na tie, ktoré treba naďalej sledovať, kým dosiahnu potrebný počet bodov.

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