Editorial

Sponsor, leader and lobbyist: The European Foundation for the Study of Diabetes (EFSD) and the future of diabetes research in Europe

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In 1999, the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD) created its own non-profit funding agency, the European Foundation for the Study of Diabetes (EFSD). Just one year later, at the most recent annual meeting of the EASD in Jerusalem, EFSD announced a major new funding programme for diabetes research in Europe in partnership with the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation International (JDFI) and Novo Nordisk. This is an opportune moment to review the essential features of this new programme and the proactive, vital role intended for EFSD in the face of the current situation of European diabetes research.

EFSD as the leader and natural partner in funding European diabetes research

EASD created its own Foundation with several goals in mind. First and foremost, it was felt that the association should become more active in funding diabetes research in Europe. This is already happening and EFSD has also launched fund-raising initiatives to this end. The ambitious long-term goal of the EFSD is to become the central agency for diabetes research funding in Europe.

European Diabetes Research Programme: up to 12 million Euros in new money for diabetes research in Europe. The EFSD has profited from its unique situation as a pan-European foundation representing all members of EASD, to partner with other organizations similarly interested in promoting diabetes research in Europe. The “European Diabetes Research Programme”, with a budget amounting to close to 12 million Euros over a 3 year period, is the first example of such partnering. For the Type I component of this programme, the JDFI is contributing up to 3.4 million Euros, and Novo Nordisk and EFSD up

to 1.7 million each. The Type II component will be financed by Novo Nordisk in the amount of up to 3.4 million Euros with EFSD contributing up to an additional 1.7 million. Details can be found on the EFSD website (<http://www.easd.org/efsd/efsd.htm>) and a “Request for Applications” appears in the News pages of this issue of Diabetologia.

Relationship with national Diabetes Associations. The EFSD intends to serve a leadership role in European diabetes-related research. The Foundation thus hopes this unique partnership venture with another non-profit Foundation and industry will be seen as an “eye-opener” by other European funding agencies, for diabetes research or for studies on other major diseases. An additional aspect of the Foundation’s policy towards fund-raising and research sponsorship merits special attention. The EFSD is fully aware of the important role played by national Diabetes Associations in most European countries. Many donate considerable funds to research. Recognizing the special local status of these associations, the EFSD intends to work with them to promote diabetes research in their respective countries. As a European entity, and in open partnership with local associations, the EFSD can rise above the limitations of national funding programmes and thereby attract more funds. There can and will be no competition, but only synergy, where there is a common cause.

The state of European diabetes research and the need for advocacy

The second major mission of the EFSD is to become active in lobbying to increase public, national and European Union awareness of the catastrophic imbalance between the severity and magnitude of diabetes and the amount of money spent on it in Europe. We

take our lead in this regard from our friends in America. There, the combined efforts of major private agencies, and most notably JDFI, have resulted in a dramatic increase in U.S. Federal spending on diabetes. Furthermore, this is additional money reserved exclusively and specifically for diabetes research. Such targetted funding for diabetes research is essentially non-existent in Europe. We are thus faced with a second, worrying imbalance on this side of the Atlantic. The quality of diabetes research in Europe remains high, as it has been for decades: certainly on a par with America. The number of experienced scientists is, however, likely to become the decisive factor in America, while the exact opposite is true in Europe. Many European scientists and science policy makers now fear a renewed brain drain, depriving Europe of its most highly trained and imaginative researchers and therefore stifling European competitiveness in the field. This must and can be prevented with appropriate action. The EFSD will here again take the initiative and play the leading part.

Readers of *Diabetologia* and members of EASD, do not need to be reminded of the devastating diseases that are together described as diabetes. The costs

to people with diabetes, in any form, in terms of suffering and financial burden are unacceptable. These costs are shared by their families and by society at large. How can it be that a disease with such a dramatic and tragic impact is not recognized as the major public health disaster that it is? How can the public be so ignorant of a disease affecting some 10% of the European population and costing governments proportionally so much more in health costs? How can an epidemic be allowed to continue to lay waste unchecked and unacknowledged? Collectively, we the experts, must assume our share of the responsibility. There is an urgent need for public advocacy and for active lobbying at the level of both national governments and the European Union. The EFSD has already taken the first steps in this direction.

Taking a proactive stance to combat a serious disease and to promote European research in parallel is certainly a captivating goal. The EFSD is rising to this challenge. We call on all members of EASD to help. This is your Association and your Foundation. The EFSD cannot achieve its lofty goals without your active support both for future fund-raising campaigns and for public advocacy initiatives.