

The EURODIAB studies on childhood diabetes 1988–1999

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The EURODIAB (EUROpe and DIABetes) research activities on the epidemiology and prevention of diabetes were established in 1988 as a European Community Concerted Action initiative under the Fourth Medical and Health Research Programme [1, 2]. As part of the EURODIAB programme, a collaborative network was established to characterise the epidemiology and aetiopathogenesis of Type I (insulin-dependent) diabetes mellitus. These research activities, subsumed under EURODIAB Sub-area A, were subsequently continued as separate concerted actions under the acronyms EURODIAB ACE (Aetiological Contribution to Type I diabetes on an Epidemiological basis), 1992–1996, and EURODIAB TIGER (Type I Genetic Epidemiology Resource), 1996–1999.

EURODIAB research on childhood diabetes has been carried out through a network of partners, with a central co-ordinating office located in Odense, Denmark. The working modalities have comprised standardised procedures and protocols, collaboration with centralised laboratory facilities, workshops, site visits and meetings, newsletters as well as a series of grant programmes to facilitate research training and development.

The core activities involved establishing a network for the registration of newly diagnosed children with Type I diabetes in geographically well-defined regions within Europe. Starting with 26 partners in 1989, the network had 44 centres contributing fully or partly to the incidence registration by mid-1999. The corresponding population coverage represents about 30 million children and most European nations. This has allowed a characterisation of the geographical distribution of Type I diabetes as well as investigations into temporal trends in incidence [3–7].

Within the framework of the network, partnerships, formed to address research in related areas, have produced new information on familial and genetic factors, clinical characteristics at disease onset and possible associations between childhood Type I diabetes and other diseases as well as insights and possible non-genetic determinants [8–16]. Numerous additional publications from the individual network partners, whose data and results have emerged partly through the collaboration, have appeared over the years.

This TIGER Supplement marks 10 years of the EURODIAB collaboration on Type I diabetes, a time when the series of contracts with the European Commission is also coming to an end. It contains new data and results from the study group as well as papers from individual network partners. It has been produced to illustrate the importance of applying epidemiological methodology in the continuous research efforts to unravel the causes and pathogenesis of Type I diabetes. The results testify to the potential that exists in Europe for this kind of research. The huge geographical variability in the distribution of the disease as well as the distinct features of trends in the incidence emerge from the accumulated data.

An epidemiological approach and the continued monitoring of the incidence of Type I diabetes in network activities like the EURODIAB ACE/TIGER collaboration offers great opportunities for progress in diabetes research. Over the years almost 30 000 cases have been accumulated, representing an unparalleled resource for further research initiatives into the causes, clinical and public health aspects of Type I diabetes. We hope that this Supplement will stimulate such initiatives.

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