Clinical and Translational Allergy: your baby is growing up

Clinical and Translational Allergy (CTA) was conceived and then delivered in June 2011 by Professor Jan Lötvall and the Board of EAACI on your behalf, as the new online open access journal for our Academy. CTA joined its grown-up half-sister journals, Allergy and Pediatric Allergy and Immunology (PAI). Why only half? CTA has the same father (your Academy) but a different publisher, BioMed Central, the mother who presents your papers, scrubbed by the review process, nurtured by the editorial team and formatted in their best bib and tucker for public scrutiny.

Your recently born CTA is growing up and developing well. Like all toddlers, it can have an occasional tantrum but remains highly esteemed by its doting parents who believe their latest child has huge future potential. Why so promising? The prospects of online open access publishing are limited only by the quality of the journal content; indeed, online publishing offers unlimited world-wide access by any internet user, for free. This is the investment you tap into when you pay an article processing charge to publish in an open access journal. Increasingly, there is a requirement by large research organisations for publicly-funded research to be disseminated in open access journals for the benefit of the widest readership. Research proposals should include this Article Processing Charge (APC) in their budgets.

What authors want, in addition to a wide circulation, is a high Impact Factor for their published research. Mean end-of-year Impact Factors in a research portfolio can determine department budgets, bench space and personal progression. In other words, Impact Factor is currently king for authors.

Impact Factors are calculated on the basis of citations of published work in a given year to articles published in the previous two years; the more citations per article, the higher the Impact Factor of the journal. CTA has a steadily increasing number of accesses for its papers (17,452 article accesses in February 2013 by comparison to 9,508 accesses in August 2012).

CTA is currently being evaluated by Thompson Reuters for tracking for an Impact Factor. This is an important time for the journal and I would like to encourage all members of the EAACI family to support and promote CTA during and beyond this transitional period.

Please consider CTA for your next manuscript and reference the papers that have already been published if they are relevant to your article. I value very highly all the contributions that have been made to date by our authors (70 submissions since launch to 2 March 2013), as well as the editorial team, our publisher and our 64 reviewers in 2012 (see Clinical and Translational Allergy 2013, 3: 4), and I look forward to leading the journal to its successful transition into maturity.

Dr Clive Grattan, MB, BChir, MA, MD, FRCP
Editor in Chief

www.ctajournal.com
EAACI: Ready for new horizons

This May issue of the EAACI Newsletter is the last one I am addressing you as the EAACI President. During my two years of the presidency, EAACI has significantly grown in quality and strength, in terms of its science, education and membership, whilst at the same time has become more professional in its approach.

We have been able to achieve these aims as a result of the extensive and efficient work of our headquarters staff, located in Zurich, through the organisation of our fantastic EAACI annual Congresses, EAACI Focused Meetings, EAACI schools, and through our scientific journals Allergy, Pediatric Allergy and Immunology and Clinical and Translational Allergy, our newsletter, website, press releases, and focused campaigns.

Following the successful completion of the Allergen-Specific Immunotherapy Campaign, The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Campaign was one of the highlights of last year. After its launch in Geneva at the EAACI Congress 2012, we published a public declaration on Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis, which is becoming one of the essential desktop documents for practising doctors to communicate “Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis” to their patients. The EAACI Food Allergy Guidelines will be presented this summer during the EAACI-WAO World Allergy and Asthma Congress 2013.

Our “EAACI Focused Meetings”, in the format of mini congresses, for PAAM, FAAM, DHM, SERIN, SAM, ISAF and ISMA, were introduced to the EAACI education and communication platform as part of one of my tasks as EAACI Vice President for Congresses. I am very proud to have seen their healthy growth, particularly in terms of the quality of their science, during my presidency of the last two years. EAACI Focused Meetings and EAACI schools provide the best opportunity to communicate the most recent science and provide a high level of education to all our members.

Over the last two years, our Academy has strengthened its links with patient organisations, ending up with the creation of an EAACI Patient Organisations Committee. This Committee represents more than 26 countries from across Europe, North America, South America, the Middle East, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and is working hard to develop better management, education, access to care, and increase safety and quality of life for patients. The Academy has already very much appreciated the contribution of the EAACI Patients Organization Committee to the Campaign and EAACI Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Public Declaration.

EAACI continuously supports the future leaders of our field, and this support has been especially reflected in the immense increase in the number of our Junior Members over the last few years. We have increased the size of the fellowship program by 50%, while the JMA mentorship program has been firmly established, allowing the best science and education to be disseminated all around Europe and beyond. The EAACI/UEMS Knowledge Examination in Allergology and Clinical Immunology is growing year by year, and is moving towards recognition as an essential examination of the specialty across the whole World.

Our members have created new Interest Groups within the Academy for Primary Care, Biologicals, and Comparative and Veterinary Allergology. These Interest Groups represent areas of growing attention within allergology, and will help the Academy to be involved and have a wider view and presence in all areas related to our field. Furthermore, the number of Task Forces creating position papers has greatly increased (to 43) over the last two years, due to the many novel developments in specific areas of research within European Science.

Our official journals, Allergy and Pediatric Allergy and Immunology, have a huge potential to increase their impact on our specialty with the full support of our Academy behind them. I am very happy that Clinical and Translational Allergy has been included in PubMed just one year after its launch and that it has already published many exciting articles. Our online presence has also grown, and we continue not only to increase the number of visits to our websites, but also the number of our followers via social media. We will continue to communicate information to our members through social media, not only about science but also about our activities and resources.

Finally, I would like to dedicate a few words to the future President of the Academy, Prof. Nikos Papadopoulos. Serving the EAACI is both hard work and a great experience; he will face challenges (sometimes) and unimaginably good moments (most of the time). I am sure he will do a great job and I wish him all the best.

Thanks very much to all those who have worked in the Academy over these two years: to the Board of Officers, the Executive Committee Members, the boards of Sections, Interest Groups, Committees and Juniors, EAACI Headquarters staff, and especially to all EAACI Members. You all make our Academy what it is: not only a big family, but also the best organisation in the field of allergy and clinical immunology.

It has been a real pleasure and honour to serve as President of the Academy and I say goodbye with the conviction that EAACI stands on solid ground and is ready for new horizons.

Cezmi Akdis
EAACI President
The EAACI’s way: a bright future for our speciality

“Appreciation is a wonderful thing: it makes what is excellent in others belong to us as well.”

Voltaire

The whole May issue of the Newsletter shines a spotlight of appreciation on the extraordinary people and events that make the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology the world leader in its field. From high quality education and research, to innovation, public engagement and promotion of human values, the EAACI’s way has deeply carved and shaped the allergy and clinical immunology landscape worldwide.

Allergy and clinical immunology is an inspiring speciality, attracting a notably diverse group of scientists, clinicians, nurses, teachers and patient organisations. It addresses a rapidly growing population, of both children and adults, with a variety of medical conditions. Allergic patients deserve to be treated by specialists with excellent knowledge and skills. This issue hosts an interview with the EAACI/UEMS Exam Committee Chair, Peter Schmid-Grendelmeyer, detailing the exam procedures and offering practical advice to candidates. Sergio del Giacco reveals the nuts and bolts behind a strong EAACI Specialty Committee, where a fruitful promotion of the allergy speciality throughout Europe, a training curriculum providing uniform level of knowledge and practices, and a critical appraisal of the evaluation modalities of CME credits have been steadily pursued. The challenge of allergic diseases in schools is discussed by Davide Parmigiani, on behalf of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe: accurate information, the optimisation of the learning environment and teacher education are important goals to achieve in order to provide a safe environment for school-age allergic patients.

Positioning allergic diseases as a public health priority and improving their current management at all levels have been top priorities for the EAACI. Two successful public campaigns on allergen specific immunotherapy and food allergy and anaphylaxis, several elite meetings such as FAAM and SERIN, 31 ongoing and 18 newly approved Task Forces, and constant support for the creation and implementation of guidelines and registries have all boosted EAACI’s reputation worldwide and raised its profile on the European political stage.

I close by inviting you to attend the major Allergy Event of the year: the EAACI-WAO World Allergy and Asthma Congress 2013, Milan, Italy, 22–26 June 2013. Premier speakers, hundreds of educational sessions to choose from and great networking opportunities await you. Dear reader: you simply cannot miss it!
Message from the President
EAACI: Ready for new horizons

Meet the Person Behind
Peter Schmid-Grendelmeyer, EAACI Exam Committee Chair

EAACI History
EAACI Specialty Committee

News
Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Campaign
Challenge of allergic diseases in schools
Fellowships 2013 winners
The Italian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (SIAIC)

News Zoom
EAACI-WAO Congress on Allergy and Asthma - Milan, 22-26 June 2013

Agenda
PAAM 2013
ISMA 2013
Report from SERIN 2013
Report from the Allergy School on Hymenoptera Venom Allergy

Sections & Interest Groups
Asthma Section
IG on Allergy, Asthma & Sports
IG on Drug Allergy
IG on Functional Genomics and Proteomics
IG on Epidemiology

Ask the Expert
Allergenicity of genetically modified foods
Tell us about yourself
I am Professor for Allergology and Dermatology and work at the University Hospital of Zurich, co-chairing since 2003 with Prof. Barbara Ballmer-Weber the Allergy Unit. Thus, education, training and research are important tasks for me. My main research areas are atopic dermatitis and molecular-based allergy diagnosis. Having worked for several years in tropical areas (in Peru and Tanzania), my interests now also extend to all Sub-Saharan Africa, collaborating with colleagues in South Africa, Tanzania and other countries. I am married, am the father of two children and love photography, music and spending time outdoors.

What are your challenges and objectives as the Exam Committee Chair?
It is an interesting task each year to produce an exam with about 120 questions that are relevant and which contain accepted facts but also recent research. Additionally, questions have to be fair and not discriminating, allowing any well-prepared participants to be tested and demonstrate their wide knowledge.

What is your impression of the EAACI/UEMS exam so far?
Prof. Werner Pichler founded the exam in 2006 and we were able to continue his work, now offering a continuously improving exam. This is also made possible by the ongoing evaluation we receive from a professional external institution (the Institute for Medical Examination (IME), Bern), by the work of the whole EAACI/UEMS Exam Committee, and through an increasingly strong and close collaboration with UEMS (European Union of Medical Specialists) which has given us a profound adaptation and integration on a European level.

What is the procedure for the exam?
Each year the members of the Exam Committee me meet to discuss and finalise new questions sent from all sections and IGs in related areas. A good balance of questions are selected for the exam booklet by IME and approved by EAACI/UEMS. Candidates submit their application for the exam to EAACI, confirming a sufficient level of training in Allergy and Clinical Immunology. The exam always takes place on the Saturday before the annual EAACI meeting and there are about 120 multiple choice questions to be answered within 3 hours. After the exam, a careful analysis takes place, during which time we eliminate any questions which have proved to be too difficult or misleading. Each participant receives their own detailed and confidential feedback about their performance. In general, candidates need to answer at least 60% of all questions correctly to pass the exam.

What practical advice would you offer to an EAACI member who is about to take the exam?
There are quite a number of example questions and an abundant list of references on the EAACI website that help candidates to prepare themselves for the exam. EAACI also offers a variety of activities such as Allergy schools or PG courses during the Annual EAACI meeting, which are excellent opportunities to cover topics.

How do you see the future of the allergy specialty across Europe?
Given the high prevalence of allergies, there is an increasing need for allergists and clinical immunologists with excellent knowledge and skills to take care of these patients. Actions such as the Blueprint for Allergy currently being prepared by UEMS and EAACI, our active collaboration with sister societies, and our work to continuously improve the quality of patient care, education and research for allergic diseases will offer our specialty an important place not only inside medicine but also within the whole of society. Thus I see a bright and exciting future for our allergy specialty across Europe.

Obituary – Prof. Alain de Weck
I was very sad to learn of the death of Professor Alain L. de Weck, who was among the leading Swiss allergists/immunologists, former Director of the Institute of Immunology, University Hospital (Inselspital) of Bern, Switzerland, Past-President of Collegium Internationale Allergologicum and World Allergy Organization, and was the winner of the first EAACI Charles Blackley Medal for Promotion of the Specialty in Europe in 2005.
EAACI sends heartfelt condolences to all in the allergy world, and particularly to Professor de Weck’s friends and family.

Cezmi A. Akdis
EAACI President
The EAACI Specialty Committee (SC) is the connecting framework between EAACI and the Section and Board of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (SBACI) of the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS).

The SC was formed in the early 1990s, as a result of collaboration between EAACI, SBACI and CEFCAP (the European Committee of Continuing Medical Education for Practising Allergologists, founded by the late Franz Marrache), with the goal of operating in the study, support and improvement of the specialty.

The Chairman of the SC is traditionally the Chairman of the SBACI, appointed as an adjunct member of the EAACI Executive Committee. I had the honour of being Chairman of both (following Antero Palma Carlos, now Honorary President) from 2001 to 2007; I am now Past-President.

SBACI is one of the sections and boards representing various specialties in the UEMS, the official institution devoted to monitoring and organizing the training and teaching of European specialists to obtain a uniform curriculum in all European countries, and bringing them to the attention of the European Parliament and Commission, which should approve and make them feasible in the EU.

SBACI has two members from each country, one representing professional institutions (Section), and the other the Academy and Scientific Societies (Board). Since 1994 it has produced improved versions of Chapter 6 of the UEMS’s Charter on training of Medical Specialists in the EU concerning all the requirements for training and teaching of ACI in Europe.

In 2004, a paper by H. J. Malling et al. (on behalf of SBACI), “Objective of training and specialty training core curriculum in allergology and clinical immunology” (Allergy, 2004, 59(6): 579–588), together with an Editorial by S. G. Del Giacco and H. J. Malling, suggested the adoption of the same training curriculum in all countries to overcome the differences and reunify the specialty. In 2005–2007, a Logbook, able to document the progression of training and to form a tool for final evaluation of competences, was published on the SBACI website (www.aciuems.com) by G. Lothagen et al.

In recent years, cooperation between EAACI and SBACI has become steadily stronger, resulting in the EAACI-UEMS Examination of ACI (the first Task Force having W. J. Pichler, S. G. Del Giacco, G. Pauli and K. Blaser as chairpersons). Most recently (under J. de Monchy as Chairman), a valid agreement between EAACI and SBACI has been reached for evaluation modalities of CME credits to be conferred to the different scientific meetings brought to the attention of both institutions.

The SC is clearly important because a strong Specialty Group is the only way to ensure:

- that trainees have a patient-oriented and not disease-oriented preparation;
- that there is a training curriculum to provide uniform knowledge and practices (with the possibility of circulating that curriculum around the whole of Europe); and,
- the importance of the idea that the patient needs to be treated by specialists with the best competences and preparation in the field, and that care from such unique specialists should allow national governments to reduce their healthcare expenses.

Finally, many thanks to EAACI and SBACI for their constant support. My hope is that the collaboration between EAACI and SBACI through our SC will continue to give strength to our beloved specialty.

Sergio G. Del Giacco, MD, PhD
EAACI Member, FAAAI, Emeritus Professor of Cagliari University, Italy
Task Forces and Position Papers are booming!

Task Forces are entities formed and activated to deal with a specific task within a given time, such as the development of a Position Paper on relevant, controversial and hot topic in allergy and clinical immunology.

Sections and Interest Groups, as well as National Societies and Individual members and Affiliates of the EAACI can request the formation of a Task Force. Non-EAACI Members can be members of Task Forces, typically when they bring specific expertise not available from inside EAACI.

There is a standard EAACI procedure for proposing and approving new Task Forces. All proposals must be submitted to EAACI HQ during regular budget process which starts in July and finish mid September each year. EAACI Executive Committee is approving new Task Forces during its regular autumn budget meeting taking into account the views of all interested parties. Each Task Force has a budget approved in order to be able to organize meetings: approved budget must be used 1 January – 31 December (it cannot be transferred into the following year) only after sending minutes and the list of participants after each organized meeting. For more details about procedure and templates for application please feel free to contact EAACI HQ (info@eaaci.org).

The number of submitted proposals for new Task Forces has rapidly increased over the last years. There were 22 Task Forces (8 ongoing and 14 new) in 2010, 36 (22 ongoing and 14 new) in 2011 and 51 Task Forces approved in 2012 (26 ongoing and 25 new). In 2012 budget allocated for Task Forces increased by almost 65% (446k€) compared to 2011 and was maintained stable for 2013 with 31 ongoing and 18 new Task forces approved.

Even more interesting that the number of Task Forces is the number and quality of the deliverables with peer-reviewed reports, position papers and sometimes guidelines published in the Academy’s official journals (Allergy, PAI – Pediatric Allergy and Immunology or CTA – Clinical and Translational Allergy). Before being submitted to any of the journals, all documents must be approved and accepted by the EAACI Executive committee.

The procedure is as follows: finished Position Papers must be submitted to the EAACI VP Education & Specialty who sends them to two reviewers; corrected Position papers are then sent to all members of the EAACI Executive Committee asking them for approval.

When the paper has been approved, the editors of the journals are informed about the ExCom decision. The flow of this process is quite fast and it assures coherence between documents and proper communication later on. It is very important to underline, that all papers written as a result of any Task Forces must be approved by the EAACI Executive Committee; if this procedure is not respected, papers will not be published as EAACI Position Papers.

Submission of finished Position Papers and their approval is possible at any time during the year. More then 30 position papers and other articles have been published until now so far as a result of the work of different Task Forces. There are already 6 Position papers published or in press in 2013 and additionally 8 papers approved by the EAACI Executive committee since January 2013.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all Task Force members for their outstanding work.

EAACI is happy to support your scientific projects and your proposals for new Task Forces for the coming years.

Pascal Demoly
EAACI Vice President
Education & Specialty

EAACI Website

Discover all the latest EAACI news and views, and learn about upcoming events and activities at www.eaaci.org. Resources such as expert opinions, pictures of EAACI events or the JMA Quiz are also easily accessible there. Visit www.eaaci.org and access a range of standard and new features, including:
- an Expert Opinion on Hymenoptera Venom Allergy, an under-recognised and under-treated disease;
- bibliographic updates in allergy and asthma across five topics;
- the JMA Quiz, offering the chance to win a travel grant for the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013;
- photo albums of EAACI events including FAAM, SERIN and the Munich Allergy School;
- a new and improved E-Bulletin, now available online;
- presentation templates for the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013; and information about Interest Groups including the new Comparative and Veterinary Allergology and Primary Care groups.

More...
Did you know that 45% of the 13,000 monthly recorded visits on www.eaaci.org are new? That translates to roughly 6,000 newcomers to the EAACI world each month!

Don’t forget...
You can browse information about the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013, including the new Executive Committee and the Strategic Programme announced by the new President online. Pictures and highlighted webcasts will be available at www.eaaci.org following the Congress.

There are a lot of reasons to visit www.eaaci.org right now, and we have plans to offer you even more. Stay tuned!

Chrysanthis Skevaki
EAACI Website Co-ordinating Editor

www.eaaci.org
Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Campaign

The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Campaign was launched during the EAACI Congress 2012 in Geneva with the aim of positioning food and nutrition as a public health priority, as well as improving the current management of food allergy at all levels, including in primary care, emergency departments and specialised medical departments.

The key pillars to the campaign have so far included events such as the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Meeting (FAAM), the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Summit, and the Public Declaration on Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis. This latter document is dedicated to policy makers at national and EU level, outlining the epidemic of the disease and the burden it poses to patients and the wider society. Much more research is needed to help develop strategies for prevention and management, and to improve the health and quality of life of food allergy sufferers. Through the Declaration, EAACI calls for EU-funded research programmes to continue to support work on food allergies, and to bring more effective diagnostic tools and treatments across the whole of the EU.

At FAAM, about 700 clinicians, regulatory body representatives, food technologists, adrenaline manufacturers, dieticians and members of the patient community, joined forces in order to improve these perspectives. Most importantly, the closed-door Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Summit held on 6 February 2013 allowed direct discussion among the most pivotal members of the allergic community (clinicians, patient organisation representatives, regulatory bodies from European/national governments, auto-injector and other pharmaceutical manufactures). This unique platform allowed many current issues to be discussed, such as the education of primary caregivers and front-line medical professionals, adrenaline auto-injectors, as well as thresholds. Patient organisation representatives voiced severe concerns for the socio-economic burden of food allergy that significantly impairs the quality of life of patients. Patients suffer from the fear of uncontrolled risk that consequently limits social behaviour, work or school productivity, as well as emotional wellbeing. Further initiatives planned are the launch of the International Minimum Standards on the Allergic Child at School, as a result of joint work undertaken by the TF on the Allergic Child at School with the Patient Organisation’s Committee.

In parallel to the scientific events, a media campaign is taking place with articles in newspapers across several European countries, including interviews with EAACI opinion leaders in the main EU languages as well as an advertising campaign on public transport in Switzerland and Italy. However the main achievement of this Campaign has been the EAACI Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Guidelines for Clinical Practice, achieved thanks to the dedication of many EAACI members and which will be launched at the EAACI-WAO meeting in Milan, Italy. The hard-work of many experts in the field has ensured the development of comprehensive guidelines that can be used by all sectors of society, which will help to improve the quality of treatment, care, awareness and – most of all – the life of food allergic patients.

The overwhelmingly success of the campaign has boosted EAACI’s vision and raised its profile on the European political stage, where EAACI hopes to influence EU political bodies and their policies by engaging in dialogue with EU partners to impact food labelling and research issues, and to broaden access to emergency anaphylaxis treatment options. The Public Declaration and campaign documents are going to be translated into the main European languages and distributed to doctors across all EU countries. We encourage EAACI members to promote the documents by downloading the relevant pdfs for distribution amongst their national communities (see: www.stopanaphylaxis.com), as well as promoting links to national websites.

Ultimately, EAACI hopes to create a platform where medical, scientific and patient organisations and industry are aligned to optimise the management of patients of allergic diseases and anaphylaxis. Together, we can do it!

Victoria Cardona
EAACI Vice-President Communication and Membership

Antonella Muraro
EAACI Treasurer and Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Campaign Chair
The challenge of allergic diseases in schools: The viewpoint of the Association for Teacher Education in Europe

Allergy affects at least one quarter of European school children, it reduces quality of life and may impair school performance. Severe food allergy reactions may occur for the first time at school and up to two thirds of schools have at least one child at risk of anaphylaxis but many are poorly prepared. Given this situation, it is likely that teachers and school staff will have to face at least one student with a serious allergic reaction. Studies indicate that an appropriate follow-up of allergic children with detailed instructions for schools can reduce the incidence of anaphylactic emergencies at school.

For these reasons, there is a strong demand for information for teachers and other school staff because teachers are not aware of all the potential risks. In fact, in two thirds of cases, a school emergency plan for the management of severe allergic reactions does not exist. For both teachers and teacher educators, we should consider three main issues: information, the organisation of the learning environment, and teacher education.

With regard to the first point, courses have been carried out in Italian schools since 2007 as part of an educational project, and experience has highlighted that teachers and school staff need information provided by a technical and cross-disciplinary group able to deal with the issue of allergic children at school from different points of view: scientific, legal, psychological and, finally, with regard to the relationship between teachers, children and their families. The educational project provided for the creation of a network to support each child and his/her family, for the definition of guidelines to carry out educational activities in school, for the definition of guidelines for the effective management of anaphylaxis, and for the creation of an educational framework for teachers about the issue of allergic children in school. To monitor the project, the Padua Education Centre (Italy) administered a questionnaire which underlined that teachers in the study had increased their knowledge and skills in the management of allergic children at school.

For the second point, we face two main aspects regarding the management of allergies in school by teachers: (i) organisational aspects – at school, there are many teachers and school staff: how do they share the responsibility? And what should happen if an allergic reaction occurs in a classroom where the teacher is not prepared to face it?; and (ii) emotional aspects – teachers reveal their concerns about managing allergic situations and their anxiety in the case of an emergency.

With regard to the third point, many teachers think that allergic students have academic difficulties. This is a key issue from the teacher education perspective because it shows the risk of the self-fulfilling prophecy. This attitude might cause negative relationships between teachers’ beliefs and students’ achievements. The key to avoid such negative behaviour is to establish good teacher education courses for both in-service and pre-service teachers. In particular, it seems crucial to arrange workshops for teachers where they have the opportunity to face allergic diseases in a real school situation.

By addressing each of these issues, it is possible to achieve our main goals: an awareness of allergy in schools, and cooperation between school staff, a child’s physician and their parents in managing the child’s allergies in school.

Davide Parmigiani
University of Genoa (Italy)
Administrative Council of ATEE (Association for Teacher Education in Europe)

4 www.centroallergiealimentari.eu.
A short history
In 1935, a small group of physicians interested in the young discipline of allergy founded a journal (Quaderni dell’Allergia) that soon became the official Journal of the Italian Association for Studies on Allergy. The first Congress of the Association was held in Florence in 1950. Three years later, the Association became the Italian Society of Allergy and, in 1969, it got its current name of the Italian Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (SIAIC).

Organisation
Currently more than 1000 specialists in allergy and clinical immunology are active members of SIAIC, with one third of them being Junior Members (<35 years). The Executive Committee is elected every three years by the General Assembly, and the President, President-Elect, Vice-President and Secretary Treasurer are nominated by the Executive Committee. The Society is widely represented throughout the country by 11 regional sections that coordinate scientific and clinical activities locally. Members of SIAIC are on the boards of the 24 specialisation schools in allergy and clinical immunology currently active in Italy.

Scientific activity
Each year, SIAIC organises a National Congress in collaboration with the Italian Federation of Immunology, Allergy and Clinical Immunology (IFIAIC). Annual winter and summer schools are organized by SIAIC with the strong participation of Junior Members, whose expenses are fully covered by travel grants. Since 2010 an Interactive School has been held to discuss hot topics in allergy and clinical immunology in a strongly interactive environment. The Italian Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, the official Journal of SIAIC, is published quarterly and is now in its 23rd year of publication. About ten mini fellowships are granted every year to Juniors to conduct short-term clinical and research activities in excellence centres in Italy.

Memberships and cooperation
SIAIC is a member of EAACI, WAO, FOCIS and UEMS. The Society is fully involved in national dissemination and implementation of official documents and guidelines published by these organisations.

Massimo Triggiani
SIAIC President

THE ITALIAN SOCIETY OF ALLERGY AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY (SIAIC):
Long-lasting traditions with an eye on the future
Allergy and Clinical Immunology national societies from many different countries will be attending the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013. With representatives from all over the world, this year’s National Society Village in Milan will be the largest ever.

The Village will be located on the exhibition floor, next to the EAACI booth, where each of the national societies will be able to inform participants about their activities, upcoming events and projects.

Each year the President visits the National Society Village to strengthen relationships between individual societies, to discuss the current situation within our specialty, and look at possible future joint projects. This year’s visit will take place on Sunday, 23 June 2013, from 12:00 to 13:00.

The National Society Village will be open from 23-25 June 2013, from 09:30 to 17:30. Take some time to visit the national society booths and learn more about other allergy societies!
The Global Atlas of Asthma published by EAACI will be launched during the EAACI-WAO World Allergy and Asthma Congress 2013 in Milan. The Global Atlas of Asthma reviews and updates the existing data on asthma incidence and prevalence, risk and protective factors, pathogenic mechanisms and treatment options, focusing on prevention and control of asthma. The paramount role of allergy in the pathophysiology of asthma is strongly emphasized in order to highlight the importance of our core specialty and as a step forward for bringing the rest of the world closer to the understanding of allergy as a major public health/international problem.

The document was written by an international group of 80 World leaders in asthma research and is aimed to be a concise reference for all the stakeholders and a platform for a strategic planning for any aspect of the disease in a multifaceted way integrating research, education and global policies.

The Global Atlas of Asthma will be published on the EAACI website and a copy will be offered to all the participants to the EAACI-WAO Congress in Milan.

Cezmi Akdis
Ioana Agache
JMAJs and educational activities at EAACI-WAO Congress 2013

Where to find...

Abstracts
All accepted abstracts will be published online at www.eaaci-wao2013.com on Saturday, 22 June 2013. Abstracts of papers that are presented at the Congress will be published in the online edition of the EAACI official journal, *Allergy*.

Handouts
Presentations made at the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013 will be published online at www.eaachihandouts.org. To access any presentation handouts, you will need your username and password which you can find printed on your EAACI-WAO Congress 2013 badge.
Certificate of Attendance
You will find your Congress Certificate of Attendance in the Congress bag you will receive on arrival.

Congress Badge
Remember to wear your badge in the Congress venue at all times. It is your entrance ticket to all sessions and to the Exhibition Hall.

EAACI Booth
Located in the Exhibition Area, the EAACI Booth will be open from 08:30 - 17:00 to XX. Please visit the booth to find out all you need to know about the Academy and its upcoming activities and events.

EAACI Members’ Lounge
If you are an EAACI Member, don’t forget to visit the Members’ Lounge, situated right next to the EAACI Booth.

EAACI Membership Services Desk
Situated in the Registration Area, the Membership Services Desk will provide you with all the information you need about EAACI membership and how to become a member, as well as how to renew your membership if you are already an EAACI member.

Junior Members and Affiliates (JMAs)
Are you a JMA? If yes, don’t miss the JMA Evening on 25 June 2013 at 19:30 at the Old Fashion Café. Don’t forget your Congress badge and your ID!

Opening Ceremony and Welcome Reception
The Opening Ceremony will be held in the Gold Room in the Congress venue on 22 June 2013, from 19:00 to 23:00. Right after the ceremony, the Welcome Reception will take place.

Programme
The full programme of sessions, with a list of speakers, chairs and abstracts, is available online on the Congress website: www.eaaci-wao2013.com. You can also check and plan your agenda through the Congress App!

Public Transport
You can reach the Congress venue by metro (Red Line 1), tram (Tram #27) and bus (Bus 78).

Registration Desk
Located at the venue entrance, the Registration Desk/Congress Secretariat will be open at the following times:

- Saturday, 22 June 08:30 – 19:00
- Sunday, 23 June 07:00 – 17:00
- Monday, 24 June 06:30 – 18:00
- Tuesday, 25 June 07:00 – 18:00
- Wednesday, 26 June 08:00 – 12:00

Exhibition Area
The Exhibition Area which has been organised for the EAACI-WAO Congress 2013 in Milan will give participants the opportunity to learn about the latest advances of the pharma industry.

Located in the Exhibition Hall at MiCo, the Exhibition Area will bring together more than 70 companies in a space of 2,100 m². Physicians, researchers and clinicians, as well as allied health professionals in the fields of allergy and clinical immunology will be able to take advantage of the opportunities on offer from a wide range of exhibitors, and learn more about their newest products and services.

The Exhibition Area will be open from 09:30 to 17:30 on 23–25 June 2013. A directory of exhibitors will be provided in the Congress’s Final Programme, together with a floor plan with the location of all the booths, so that you can organise your schedule and not miss anything!

EAACI-WAO Congress 2013 App
- Create your personal itinerary and add it to your calendar
- Get the latest scientific programme updates
- Practical information about the venue
- Locate exhibitors and view exhibitor information
- And more!

More information about the app will be available on www.eaaci-wao2013.com closer to the congress
Antihistamines in allergy
Relying on safety to optimize efficacy success
The EAACI-WAO Congress 2013
Room 4 - Sunday, June 23rd 17:30

Chaimen
Prof. G. Walter Canonica
Prof. Nikolaos G. Papadopoulos

17.30h 23.06.2013
Antihistamines – what are the differences beyond effectiveness?
by Prof. Massimo Triggiani, Italy

18.00h 23.06.2013
Antihistamines and CNS safety - the quest for an ideal non-sedating antihistamine.
by Prof. Ralph Moesges, Germany

18.30h 23.06.2013
Allergic Rhinitis and urticaria - using the modern antihistamine to shape clinical success.
by Prof. Claus Bachert, Belgium
The Pediatric Section’s preparations for the Athens Pediatric Allergy and Asthma Meeting in October 2013 are progressing well. Please visit the PAAM 2013 website (www.eaaci-paam.org) where you will find the programme. We have an exciting range of plenary and symposia sessions covering the breadth of allergy and asthma in children and adolescents. This is in addition to postgraduate and small group discussion sessions which were extremely well received at our last PAAM meeting. Registration is open via the website. This meeting will be CME accredited and will offer travel grants to JMA’s who are presenting authors of a submitted abstract.

PAAM 2013 will take place at the Megaron Athens International Conference Centre (MAICC), situated right in the heart of Athens and easily accessible. We should also mention Athens itself, a city with an intriguing mixture of the ancient and new, and with wonderful Mediterranean cuisine. And October is a perfect month to visit with plenty of sun and heat.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Graham Roberts
PAAM 2013 Co-Chair
Nikos Papadopoulos
PAAM 2013 Chair & EAACI
President Elect

Highlights of the programme
* Can we explain the high prevalence of allergy in westernized countries?
* Immune modulation in prevention of allergic diseases
* Off-protocol therapies for severe allergic disease
* Dermatology for the practicing pediatrician
* Therapeutic problems in childhood asthma
* Different perspectives on GI food allergy
* Stress, psychosocial issues and allergic diseases

If you are interested in learning more about allergenic molecules and their interaction with the immune system, or how crystallography can contribute to prediction of cross reactivity and the application of the molecular toolbox to design novel immunotherapy vaccines, then you should attend the upcoming ISMA meeting in Vienna, Austria, from 5-7 December 2013. The scientific committee has put together an attractive programme and invited well-known scientists in the field who will present cutting edge technology and exciting new data. In parallel, young scientists are encouraged to submit their abstracts and will get a chance to present their data in oral abstract sessions.

ISMA 2013 will take place at the Aula der Wissenschaften, which is centrally located and only a few minutes walk away from St. Stephen’s Cathedral. Don’t miss the opportunity to meet leading scientists in the field and enjoy the pre-Christmas season in Vienna.

K. Hoffmann-Sommergruber
ISMA 2013 Chair

Highlights of the programme
* History of Molecular Allergology
* Allergens: Production, purification, structure analysis
* Eliciting (Visualisation) of mucosal immunity
* Allergen-Immune system Interaction: From the sensitization to effector phase
* Allergen specific Diagnosis Recent update
The scientific programme had been developed so that it covered the most recent trends of research in the field of upper airway disease, with a mixture of lectures from world experts in the field and from young researchers. The first day of the meeting was dedicated to basic immunologic research, focusing on different cell types and their contributions to rhinitis, rhinosinusitis and nasal polyps, with contributions from Prof. Cezmi Akdis, Prof. Ruby Pawankar, Prof. C. Bachert and Prof. W. Fokkens, amongst many others. Highlights of the second day were the pathophysiology lectures on olfactory and neurologic dysfunction in chronic upper airway disorders by Prof. Pete Smith, Dr Basile Landis and Prof. Philippe Rombaux. The third day of the symposium was dedicated to the central position of the nose in naso–bronchial, naso–ocular and nose–brain interaction, followed by an up–date on the latest developments in treatment by Dr Glenis Scadding, Prof. Cemal Cingi and Prof. Philippe Gevaert.

On behalf of the ENT Section of EAACI and the Local Organising Committee, I thank all of those who contributed to the success of SERIN 2013 in Leuven, by their enthusiastic presence, their contribution to the lively discussions between the lectures and/or by sharing their latest data in the field of upper airway immunology via poster presentation or invited lecture. All ENT section board members are convinced that the SERIN meeting gave a boost to their affinity for the ENT section of the EAACI, and strengthened their knowledge on chronic upper airway disease in daily practice. As well as the scientific events, the social programme was greatly appreciated by participants, especially the welcome drink in Leuven’s historic city hall and the speech by the mayor of the city.

Thus, the future of SERIN is bright and we will update you in due course about the next conference!

We hope to see you all in June in Milan.

Peter Hellings
EAACI ENT Section Chair
Fifty-one participants and 15 speakers from twenty-two countries used the opportunity to improve their knowledge on Hymenoptera venom allergy. The Allergy School was organized by the Interest Group on Hymenoptera Venom Hypersensitivity of the EAACI in collaboration with the DGAKI (German Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology) and was held from 11 to 13 April in Munich, Germany. In the beginning, an interesting overview about the history of venom immunotherapy (VIT) was imparted by Ulrich Müller, followed by an insight of protective mechanisms of VIT by Cezmi Akdis. Knowledge on distribution and behaviour of Hymenoptera presented by Volker Mauss may help in the identification of insects. Markus Ollert and Thilo Jakob provided clues to a better diagnostics by using component resolved diagnosis for IgE-measurement. Beatrice Bilò examined the natural history of Hymenoptera venom allergy and delivered important take-home messages concerning anaphylaxis management. The first day ended with a warm welcome reception at the meeting venue.

On the second day, Gunter Sturm stated that 60% of patients with negative tests can be diagnosed with the basophil activation test. Joanne Oude Elberink remarked an elevated rate of false positive skin test reactions, when using a concentration of 1 mg venom/ml for the intradermal test, whereas the concentration 0.1 mg/ml is very specific. Franziska Rueff pointed the role of baseline tryptase concentration; the dose-dependent effectiveness of VIT supports the option to treat patients at risk for treatment failure with an elevated venom dose. Afterwards the Junior Member Darío Antolín-Amérgo reviewed a great variety of build-up protocols, concluding that there is still too few data to give a clear recommendation for or to advise against a specific build-up schedule. Ewa Cichocka-Jarosz underlined the safety of VIT in children. Marek Niedoszytko presented a thorough review about risk factors, prevention and management of side effects. Another active Junior Member, Byrthe Vos, gave insight to the frequency of mastocytosis (around 2-3%) in Hymenoptera venom allergic patients. In order to identify mastocytosis, it was recommended to measure baseline tryptase before starting VIT, and to perform a meticulous skin examination. The day finished with a review by Constantinos Pitsios about possible contraindications of VIT, a field, in which also data on clear influencing factors are rare. Interactive Practical courses about mastocytosis, in-vitro tests, different build-up schedules and difficult cases, facilitated for intense discussion. The day ended with a typical Bavarian dinner at the Hofbräukeller with music and funny activities in a charming environment.

On Saturday, interesting case reports and posters were followed by constructive discussions. The assessment of non-Hymenoptera insect bites was elegantly exposed by Peter Schmid-Grendelmeier. Finally, Franziska Rueff talked about the available tools for monitoring the effects of VIT, and stated that the sting challenge test is the most reliable parameter to assess efficacy of VIT.

I would especially like to thank Franziska Rueff for a wonderful Allergy School and I take the opportunity to invite you to consider attending such meetings where speakers and delegates get to know each other and even plan future projects!

Darío Antolín-Amérgo
Interest Group on Allergy, Asthma and Sports

Over the last two decades, Sports Allergy studies have been extended from athletes to exercisers, increasingly capturing the attention of the general public. The Interest Group on Allergy, Asthma and Sports (IGAAS) at present has more than 50 registered members. Our priorities are: to promote research on prevalence pathogenesis, diagnosis and treatment of sport-related allergic diseases; to promote awareness and knowledge, among health-care providers and patients, about factors contributing to health problems in allergic or asthmatic subjects during recreational and competitive sports; and to promote a forum of scientific discussion within the EAACI, with the aim of establishing high and evidence-based standards of health care in the field of allergy, asthma and sports.

In order to fulfill our goals, several activities have been launched. IGAAS has been involved in several Task Forces, such as ‘Recognising and diagnosing exercise-related asthma, respiratory and allergic disorders in sports’, ‘Lifestyle interventions in allergy and asthma: EAACI Evidence-Based Clinical Practice Guideline Task Force Report’ and ‘Exercise-induced Anaphylaxis’. Recently we have created a Facebook page in order to improve communication within our IG and with other EAACI structural entities, as well as to improve the spreading of information to patients. IGAAS has also been very active in research, with a large number of published papers. Furthermore, in 2013, we are plan to publish a summary of all members’ milestone contributions.

The EAACI–WAO Congress in Milan is fast approaching and will hopefully be an excellent occasion to meet all members interested in this field, to present research findings, and to exchange ideas. All EAACI members are cordially invited to the IGAAS Business Meeting on Sunday 23rd of June, starting 10:30 am. Don’t miss this great opportunity!

Mariana Couto
IGAAS JMA Representative

Matteo Bonini
IGAAS Chairperson

Facebook: www.facebook.com/#!/pages/EAACI-Interest-Group-on-Allergy-Asthma-Sports/402094376532838

EAACI Asthma Section

The EAACI Asthma Section proposed a five-year strategic plan at the end of 2010 which put the scientific emphasis on asthma endotypes, severity and exacerbations. Several meetings and Allergy Schools were included in the plan, and several position papers and guidelines were to be created. Junior members were put at the centre of future activities.

In November 2011, the first Asthma Summit took place in Athens. A document was created compiling the conclusions of all the relevant discussions which took place during the meeting (e.g. ‘How to define severe asthma?’). That document will be published later this year. During the summer of 2012, the Asthma Section organised an Allergy School in Estonia, focusing on asthma exacerbations. Later in the year, the International Severe Asthma Forum (October 2012, Goteborg, Sweden) provided a lot of new ideas, and major updates in asthma were discussed. This well-attended meeting revealed that it is now clear that asthma is heterogeneous, and that several endotypes and phenotypes exist that may require different treatment strategies.

At the EAACI elections (Spring 2013) part of the Asthma Section board changed, with a new chairperson and secretary being elected; we thank Adnan Custovic and Stefano Del Giacco for their efforts during all their years on the board.

The new Asthma Section board will continue to implement the five-year strategic plan, with the aim of the EAACI becoming a World Leader in Asthma Research.

Sven Seys
Junior Representative Asthma Section

Dear friends,

This is my last article for the JMA-Corner as, in June, during the EAACI-WAO Congress in Milan, my mandate as JMA Chairperson will end. Therefore, I’d like to use this space to thank those many JMAs who have actively collaborated with us in order to realise our projects and brought new ideas that I’m sure the next Working Group will transform into reality!

Over the last two years many JMA-targeted activities have been organised and, considering the tremendous increase in new JMA members that we have registered, I can safely assume that they were a success.

Of course my last, but not least, thanks go to the wonderful JMA Working Group I had the luck to collaborate with, and to the Executive Committee and the HeadQuarters staff who believe in our projects and helped us to realise them.

I look forward to meeting all of you in Milan and I encourage you to keep showing the same enthusiasm, as JMAs are an important part of EAACI and are indeed its new lifeblood.

See you in Milan!

Enrico Heffler
JMA Chair
Interest Group on Drug Allergy

The Interest Group (IG) on Drug Allergy works actively and continuously on ways to foster diagnosis and management of drug hypersensitivity. In terms of continuing education, in September 2011 we had a “Summer School” in Peschiera della Garda which was fully booked and much appreciated by all the attendants. The next Summer School will cover NSAID Hypersensitivity and will be held in Malaga (in September 2013). A Drug Hypersensitivity Meeting was hosted in April 2012 in Munich by Knut Brockow and formed the scientific highlight of the year; here the most recent developments in the field were presented through more than 230 submitted abstracts, various plenary sessions, symposia, seminars, poster sessions and case presentations. During the EAACI Congress 2012 in Geneva, the multiple Drug Allergy sessions were well visited. The group held a business meeting during that Congress, as well as a less formal autumn meeting in September as part of the European Network on Drug Allergy (ENDA) meeting hosted by Andreas Bircher, which is always the place to discuss new studies and results.

Some recent activities of the IG and specific Task Forces (TFs) have resulted in EAACI Position Papers, such as those on Desensitisation in Delayed Drug Hypersensitivity (Allergy, in press), Skin Test Concentrations in Drug Hypersensitivity (Allergy, in press), and on NSAID Hypersensitivity (submitted to ExCom). Other papers are in progress, such as on those on Drug Hypersensitivity in Mast Cell Disease and on Pediatric Drug Allergy. The group continues to be active in multicentre studies on skin test standardisation (A. Barbaud), aspirin desensitisation (G. Cortellini), mast cell disease in drug hypersensitivity (P. Bonadonna), radiocontrast media allergy (K. Brockow) and chemotherapy allergy (M. Pagani).

The group has ongoing TFs on:
- mastocytosis and drug allergy – which has nearly finished a position paper and multicentre study results on mast cell involvement in drug allergy;
- drug allergy in children – which is well on the way to finalising a draft about the epidemiology, symptoms and management of drug allergy in children;
- constructing a standardised European Drug Allergy Passport, and working on a position paper to this effect; and
- in-vitro diagnosis in drug hypersensitivity (recently accepted as a new TF).

Knut Brockow
Drug Allergy IG Chairperson

Interest Group on Functional Genomics and Proteomics

Functional genomics aims to detect the changes that have occurred between the healthy and the diseased state of an individual, with the ultimate goal of helping to diagnose and treat the patient. Recently, new research dogmas have emerged that have moved away from hypothesis-driven research to “unbiased” and hypothesis-generating approaches. In this process have been the technological developments in high throughput methods describing the potential numerous differences between the healthy and diseased states. In turn, this has allowed the exploration of the personalised medicine concept, where individuals at the molecular level may each suffer from a unique disease that may require a dedicated treatment approach.

When disease can be seen as a change from the normal healthy situation we can consider the fields of genomics (DNA), transcriptomics (RNA), proteomics (protein) and metabolomics (reaction products) as interdependent research areas that explore possible reasons for these changes. With the realisation that we need to consider the interaction of multiple genes in both cells and tissues, we enter the field of systems biology, which contains a set of tools aimed at integrating the large amount of data generated by the multiple “omics” approaches. A successful collaboration between clinicians, bioinformaticians and basic scientists will be required. Basic scientists are expected to generate results using human samples, which means that favourite mouse models or cell lines would need to be approached more critically and only used for questions that could not otherwise be addressed. On the other hand, it also means that more attention should be given to pre-clinical research in clinical departments. Setting up local collaborations may go a long way towards achieving the goal of introducing functional genomics. However, do not expect that your local microarray or proteomic facility will be able to come up with an answer when asked: “Could you please explain this disease to me?”

Lars Olaf Cardell
Functional Genomics and Proteomics IG Chairperson
Interest Group on Epidemiology

How time flies! It is already two years since our Epidemiology IG was formed at the Istanbul Congress and we would like to update the wider EAACI community on our current activities.

Just to recap, the main reasons for forming the Epidemiology IG were:
› to raise the profile of population-based studies as well as clinical trials within EAACI;
› to organise educational activities on study methodology and statistics to help improve the quality of epidemiological allergy studies;
› to foster research collaborations between epidemiologists in the allergy field; and
› to support research projects, such as registries and population-based studies, in the context of EAACI.

So, what have we been up to so far? We organised a well-attended postgraduate course on ‘Epidemiology for the Clinical Allergist’ last year in Geneva and have run a PG on how to conduct systematic reviews and meta-analyses this year, in collaboration with UK and Canadian colleagues from the Cochrane collaboration.

We also set up a Task Force on allergic disease registries (A-Reg TF, initiated and chaired by Prof. Nikos Papadopoulos). The main aim of the A-Reg TF is to evaluate the potential for EAACI to coordinate and/or implement patient registries. As a first step, we have just completed a survey of existing allergic disease registries among EAACI members. Our TF has also become an official Collaborating Partner of the EU-funded cross-border PARENT (PAatient REgistries INiTiative) Programme, which allows us to draw upon external expertise with regard to chronic disease registry methodology. Furthermore, we are conducting a systematic review of the current allergic disease registry literature.

Last but not least, we have just started a second TF led by Dr Jon Genuneit, from Ulm, on ‘Gaps in allergic disease epidemiology’, a systematic review on risk and protective factors of allergic disease.

As you can see, our IG is rapidly moving from infant to toddler stage, with the vision to become a mature adult within the next few years. We have been very encouraged by the continuous rise in our IG’s membership and welcome anybody with a passion for epidemiology, clinical trials and public health to join us. We hope to catch up with you in Milan. Why not come to our Business Meeting or have a look at our IG website (www.eaaci.org/sections-a-igs/epidemiology-ig/) to find out what we do!

Carsten Flohr
Epidemiology IG Chairperson
carsten.flohr@kcl.ac.uk

George Konstantinou
Epidemiology IG Secretary
gkonstantinou@gmail.com
Allergenicity of genetically modified foods

The debate on genetically modified organisms (GMOs) continues to stir up intense emotions, particularly in Europe. Opposition to GMOs has many different roots including religious convictions (“don’t interfere with God’s creation”), anti-capitalist/anti-globalist activism (“GMO companies exploit poor farmers in developing countries”), or environmental activism (“GMOs will jeopardize biodiversity”). In an editorial (in September 2012) in the journal *Science*, Amsterdam University Professor Louise Fresco (specialist in “the foundations of sustainable development in an international context”), wrote that “Europe’s lack of trust in GMOs reflects a wider distrust of science” (Science, 339(6122): 883). In the same paper, she further stated that “respected independent institutions in Europe have provided evidence that GM crops can contribute to sustainable food production, especially when bred for insect and disease resistance, and that they do not carry risks beyond those of conventional varieties”.

The EAACI Newsletter is perhaps not the place to have a more general social and political discussion about the potential risks of GMOs in the broadest sense. Here it suffices to say that regulation of GMOs should be science-driven, i.e. evidence-based instead of emotion-driven.

One aspect of the public debate on GMOs that does have relevance for EAACI is that GMOs are frequently presented as a potential threat to food allergic patients and that the (possible) recent rise in food allergies may be caused by the introduction of GMOs, mainly GM soya (soya) and corn. To date, there is no scientific proof that GM crops, having entered the market and consequently the food chain, have turned out to be an increased risk for food allergic patients.

The image of GMOs being “more allergenic” than conventional crops may originally stem, to a great extent, from a single publication in the New England Journal of Medicine in 1996. There, the introduction of a major allergen (from Brazil nut) into GM soya was reported. The aim was to increase the nutritional value (increased methionine content) of animal feed. The project was, however, abandoned when evaluation protocols revealed the allergenic nature of the proposed transgene and that particular GM soy never reached the market. Although the paper was in fact a demonstration that screening procedures aiming at evaluating possible allergic risks of new GMOs actually worked, the damage was done. Since that time, no GMOs have been introduced to the market to which a known allergen has been introduced, confirming the efficacy of screening procedures. Furthermore, there are no studies that corroborate the assertion that the introduction of GMOs has any relation to the increased prevalence of food allergy – itself a development that is not (yet) really supported by firm evidence. The coincidence of two developments is by no means automatic proof of a causal relation: such a proof requires thorough, well-designed epidemiological research.

This does not, of course, mean that the introduction of a novel gene into a crop cannot potentially involve the risk of introducing a protein that turns out to be an allergen. To assess the possible allergenic risk of a protein, there are two properties that deserve attention: first, an allergen can be a protein that just binds specific Immunoglobulin E (IgE), and by doing so triggers an allergic reaction in patients already having that particular IgE; second, an allergen can be a protein that can, additionally, induce de novo production of specific IgE antibodies that makes a protein an allergen. In conclusion, the evaluation of potential allergic risks of GM crops should be based on a weight-of-evidence approach, as formulated in the 2003 Guidelines of the Codex Alimentarius. The use of non-validated methods to predict allergenicity should not be supported, i.e. regulations should be evidence-based. Industry’s awareness, responsibility and implementation of the weight-of-evidence approach of the Codex Alimentarius has prevented foods containing GM crops from putting food allergic patients at increased risk.

Ronald van Ree
Professor of Molecular and Translational Allergology, Academic Medical Center, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
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