

ORPHEUS PLAN OF ACTIVITIES 2010-2013, PROPOSAL BY THE PRESIDENT

Proposed agenda for future ORPHEUS development and plan of activities for the next three- year term (2010-2013)

Zdravko Lackovic, ORPHEUS president

As we all know, our first conference was held in Zagreb in 2004, a year before the famous EUA conference in Salzburg. It is quite understandable but we can, nevertheless, feel justly proud we had reached similar conclusions. For the first time, we had defined a PhD program, the quality level of theses it produces and the organization of thesis evaluation without conflict of interest thus providing our PhD candidates, future researchers, with the framework for the best possible education and scientific achievement. It has always been important to us to have PhD students voicing their views at our conferences. At the second conference, also held in Zagreb, we set down the guidelines for organization of PhD programs. This period was followed by a year of defining our statute, rules and regulations governing the Executive Committee and looking for a way to formally register our organization in Europe, where registration can be done only within particular national jurisdiction and legislation. In 2007, we organized the conference in Helsinki where we discussed and promoted the importance of PhD training in clinical research. This was especially important since some countries do not offer PhDs in areas of clinical medical research. The Helsinki 2007 conference was also notable for appearance of our first ORPHEUS members. After another year of preparation and consolidation, we organized the conference in Aarhus in 2009, summing up the results of past conferences into standards in PhD education in biomedicine and health research. This

document has won approval and support from notable international organizations such as AMSE, ASPHER and AMEE and will serve as a basis for the last document in the WFME trilogy on European and global standards for quality improvement in medical education. We are now looking forward to this conference in Vienna which should not only move our interests in a new direction but also enable achieving a higher quality of PhD education in Europe. From nine in 2004, ORPHEUS now has fifty-three institutional members. From 25 participating universities from 16 European countries in Zagreb 2004, we are now at a conference with participation of 104 institutions from 36 European countries. There has never been an organized gathering of so many universities and faculties of biomedicine and health sciences in Europe. From almost a private initiative, ORPHEUS is becoming a recognized European association.

The planning of ORPHEUS activities in the upcoming period is the most important element of the future of our organization, particularly the future when most of us founding members will no longer participate in the EC. A few scenarios present themselves, the most likely being the continuation and broadening of ORPHEUS activities. Our success will depend on our initiative as well as the overall direction of development in European PhD programs. The fact that we now have over fifty institutional members and that this conference has brought together almost 200 participants, is, naturally, a result of our hard work. However, it is also a consequence of a highly challenging part of the European Bologna process left to the universities to overcome. Apart from the general provisions of these ministerial Bologna conferences and taking into account considerable differences in tradition of European countries, the number of questions raised and contradictions observed is considerable. European University Association even founded a separate Council for Doctoral Education to help members deal more efficiently and successfully with rising questions and challenges. ORPHEUS has become an active associate member of EUA-CDE promoting specificities in the area of biomedicine and health sciences. One can assume that these challenges surrounding PhD education in Europe will continue for quite a while. After these issues have been dealt with, the significance of ORPHEUS will most probably diminish and it will primarily become a place for exchange of experience or the mission will simply be accomplished.

Another additional approach I would advocate is more proactive and includes, together with everything already proposed, formation and development of ORPHEUS networks ñ based on the existing ORPHEUS documents emphasizing the need for internationalization and mobility. Unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity to examine and determine possibilities of such cooperation in detail at this Vienna conference. However, †we can well imagine that the future

development of such networks would surely include international quality control, for example visitations or awarding ORPHEUS recognition or ORPHEUS label (even accreditations in the future can not be ruled out). Obviously, there are formal government institutions responsible for accreditations already, but nothing is preventing us from creating our own, for the beginning more simple system as guarantee of quality and prerequisite for networking . If this system were to be easy understandable, not too expensive and of high quality, most universities would be proud of the of the "ORPHEUS label" alongside their name (acknowledging that the programme is in line with ORPHEUS standards). At first, it would be impossible to create large networks owing to the disparity in development and quality of particular PhD programs and the first networks would have to be established between universities of comparative level of development and quality. We can set the final goal very ambitiously and aim to create the European network of networks. In this respect ORPHEUS will become more and more a platform for networking. List of more than 200 European PhD programs on ORPHEUS web site is a first modest step toward this goal. Additionally, a particularly important factor in our final goal would have to be trying to discover, define and implement attempts/experiments/poorly utilized models of network self-sustainability, the ability to persist and thrive even after the abundant international funding ceases. The question to ask oneself is how many of today's PhD networks can continue after outside funding stops.

I believe that the activities of ORPHEUS will continue in our good traditions of organizing conferences, further developing highly informative web pages, performing various promotional activities such as printing and distributing conference documents to as many European medical universities as possible. Having in mind certain discussions among EC members, I feel the need to emphasize that ORPHEUS is required to organize regular annual assemblies by law of the country where the organization was registered in. In addition, we are starting with organization of national/regional ORPHEUS meetings from this year. We are also endeavoring to publish a special monograph containing all national reports presented at this and past conferences. Unfortunately, we are still missing reports from some major European countries such as UK and France.

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After the Aarhus position paper on standards of PhD education we hope that in Vienna we can create another strategic document on cooperation and networking. This conference is going to give us a broad review of cooperation between PhD programs and industry, other scientific institutions and European scientific societies, in particular. Many more specific issues are left for conferences to come. Naturally, our future development will depend on the circumstances in Europe, our level of engagement and on our rate of successfully relating interests of less developed small scientific communities on one hand and encouraging the development and international competitiveness of European centers of excellence in biomedicine and health sciences on the other.

Regarding future activities, one of the first tasks we are facing is preparing the conference in Izmir to the best of our abilities.† We will discuss a possible need for ORPHEUS networks and ORPHEUS formal recognition of PhD programs available across Europe.

Cooperation with institutions with similar mission is of vital importance. First ORPHEUS conferences were attended and supported not only by universities but also by representatives of ASPHER, AMEE, EMA and, most importantly, by AMSE. We are now striving to be as active as possible within the EUA-CDE. In future, we would like to strengthen this cooperation and spread it to include other associations such as ADEE or WFME, in particular. So far we have only one scientific society as an associate member, EPHAR ñ the Federation of European Pharmacological Societies.† It is my opinion that striving for better cooperation with other scientific societies is very significant for us since they are our most logical partner whom we share most goals with but pose no competition to. In addition to all this, we are also organizing a workshop on PhD programs at the World Congress of Pharmacology – WorldPharma2010 with participation of colleagues from UK, USA and Turkey. I hope that there will be many such initiatives in the future.

In conclusion, with continuing our present activities, publishing specific monographs, organizing local† or regional meetings, cooperating with European scientific associations, academic institutions and industry and becoming involved in new activities of promoting and creating regional and wider networks of PhD programs, I firmly believe that our organization has a sound future, indeed.

† *(The proposal was adopted by ORPHEUS General Assembly held in Vienna, 2010, April 19)*