

Defining a discipline: European standards for certification of pharmacologists – the EPHAR EuCP Programme

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Ever since the origin of pharmacology as a science in the 19th century, our discipline has faced the difficulty of defining itself. Although the literal translation of ‘pharmacology’ as the ‘science of drugs’ seems self-evident, scientists in our field far too often are merely seen – and sometimes even define themselves – as scientists performing research the results of which might be useful for the development of drugs. As a consequence, the understanding of the general public and even that of other biomedical disciplines for pharmacology as a distinct scientific field and discipline has dramatically dwindled in the recent past. Thus, not only in the UK but also in other European countries, pharmacology departments have disappeared as they have been merged with other research entities into larger units and in many cases not even laboratories have retained their distinction as pharmacological units. EPHAR, the Federation of European Pharmacological Societies, has now initiated a certification scheme, the European Certified Pharmacologists (EuCP) programme, which is intended to provide a distinctly visible documentation certifying that bearers of this certificate excel in standards of education, skills, experience and professional standing in pharmacology. Giving emphasis on the breadth of knowledge and experience across the entire range of this discipline, the EuCP programme shall identify those experts who are most likely to be competently answer questions on drug-related problems across the entire breadth of the discipline, using European-wide, clearly defined standards and criteria.

Based on a concept developed by a core working party of EPHAR, a working group consisting of representatives of 21 out of the 27 member societies of the federation agreed on the final guidelines of the EuCP programme. The criteria include specific requirements detailing the minimum extent of knowledge, practical awareness and skills across the whole discipline. These rules, as well as the requirement for re-certification at regular intervals, follow the standards set out by the EMTRAIN/LifeTrain subproject of the European Union’s Innovative Medicines Initiative for continuous professional development (1,2,3).

Acknowledging the fact that the legal framework of pharmacological societies is different in each of the various European countries, the EuCP programme is based on national certifications, whether issued by societies of pharmacology or by other legal bodies, allowing for a maximum of flexibility and at the same time ensuring common, high standards.

As of November 2014, the EuCP programme has been formally approved and adopted by 16 of the 27 member societies of EPHAR (Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal,

Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey), representing about 5,200 of the ca. 10,000 individual members of the entire membership of EPHAR.

- (1) Klech *et al.* (2012). *Eur J Pharmacol*, 45: 515–520.
- (2) Hardman *et al.* (2013). *Nat Rev Drug Discov*, 12: 407–408.
- (3) Wolzt *et al.* (2014). *Intrinsic Activity*, 2(Suppl 1): A3.2