

Why should we need a European Federation of Addiction Societies?

National societies for the study of addiction have been established in almost all European countries. However, as yet very little concerted action exists. A European Federation of Addiction Societies could play a leading role in fostering collaboration within Europe and beyond. The coordination and extension of lobbying activities for more funding of addiction research on a European level would be another important goal.

From a global perspective, Europe is the continent where alcohol consumption is highest in the world [1,2]. More than 60 million inhabitants of the European Union (EU) consume alcohol in a hazardous or harmful way. Alcohol use disorders in men were again ranked number one in disability-adjusted life years (DALY) within brain disorders in Europe [3]. Adding tobacco smoking to the equation, more than 20% of DALYs are accounted for by those drugs [4]. No other continent has such a high consumption, which translates into multiple consequences including a very substantial loss in productivity. Those figures put disorders linked to alcohol and tobacco consumption into the same league as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. However, while traditionally cancer and heart diseases have been studied widely both on a national and a European level, this is not true for alcohol and tobacco. The funding of research for addiction is scattered. It concentrates primarily on illegal drugs under the EU drugs action plan and is coordinated by the EU justice directorate. From a purely research perspective, none of the research framework programmes of the European Commission has had addictions as an overriding topic. This lack of research is reflected in a widespread lack of progress in prevention and treatment. So far, no scientific society on a European or national level has taken up the issue and successfully influenced the research programmes of the European Commission towards investing more in addiction-related research. Therefore, new efforts are needed, with continuous and coordinated action to bring about change. The addiction field needs a well-planned lobbying initiative in its best sense.

As a result of the widespread lack of funding, European clinicians and researchers rely heavily upon data generated elsewhere in the world. The United States, with their National Institutes of Health (NIH)—of which two are concerned exclusively with addiction research—spend more than \$2 billion a year and are responsible for more than 85% of addiction research funding worldwide (personal communication of a former director of

an NIH institute). This may be less of a problem when one considers basic research and pre-clinical studies. However, matters are different with regard to clinical issues. Prevalence rates, the social background, the remuneration system, treatment approaches, the recruitment of patients for trials and much more is very different in the United States [5]. As a consequence, data gained from clinical studies in the United States are often not informative enough for European purposes (neither for other places in the world). Nevertheless, they continue to be used as a basis for decisions in health-related policy issues as well as in prevention and treatment approaches in Europe and elsewhere.

A further point why learned societies in Europe should strengthen their collaborations, and possibly their benchmarking efforts, relates to teaching and education. Large research programmes have inherent elements in both areas which tend to translate into teaching at universities, medical schools and psychology departments, etc. Although programmes in addiction research have been funded in different European countries or regions such as Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Russia, Germany, France, Spain and others, these programmes were never meant as a continuous source of funding. On the contrary, they were run for a few years without follow-up. As a result, skilled young researchers who worked successfully in these programmes had to leave the addictions field to make a living. For all these reasons, addiction offers few career opportunities in Europe, which translates into poor teaching for future medical doctors and psychologists in this major area of diseases and disabilities.

The 20th century has taught us that science and research are never free of preconceptions, traditions and political influence. These can result in prejudiced and ideological thinking which may dominate research topics and funding. These tendencies continue to play a role even nowadays, which gives further reasons to conceive and establish a European Federation of Addiction Societies. There is a tremendous richness of ideas, experiences and ethical concepts about alcohol and drug problems that stretch beyond one region and require extended discussion and benchmarking on a European level and beyond. Europe, with its many countries and traditions, has a wealth of national and a few supranational societies in the addiction field. So far they have not been linked to each other in any way. To achieve some of the above-mentioned goals it seemed timely to establish a close collaboration between those societies.

In the summer of 2010 23 addiction societies from 16 European countries came together in Paris and founded the European Federation of Addiction Societies (EUFAS). It pursues two major goals. EUFAS collects data on current practice in prevention and treatment in the countries of its member societies and offers comparisons and benchmarking. Furthermore, EUFAS collaborates with national and international stakeholders in order to obtain an appropriate share of funding for addiction research from the European Commission. Collaborations will be extended to already existing European institutions such as the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and others. While EUFAS has grown considerably since its foundation, we continue to welcome national societies working in the field of alcohol consumption, tobacco smoking, illegal drugs and behavioural addictions. EUFAS sees its role in the spirit of the Treaty of Lisbon, which aims at improving political and social life in Europe, at stimulating the economy and at strengthening research (http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/glance/index_en.htm). EUFAS is open for global partnership. Collaborations with societies and federations spanning different continents or even global confederations are welcome (<http://www.EUFAS.net>). The pursuit of this agenda will need much time and effort. We hope to be successful through partnership in national and international conferences and through the use of electronic media and publishing in scientific journals, some of which started following an international agenda long ago [6].

Declarations of interest

None.

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Keywords Addiction consequences, addiction societies, addiction research, benchmarking in treatment and prevention, burden of disease, disability adjusted life years.

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