ESF EMRC EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP

Network on primary HIV infection in Europe: when and how

Scientific Report

Cesano Maderno, Italy, 5-6 October 2006

Convened by:
Giuseppe Tambussi

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INTRODUCTION

Primary or acute HIV infection refers to the specific time of HIV viral infection or viral inoculation, while early HIV infection refers to the period of time when people have recently become infected. In the vast majority of adult cases (85%) early HIV infection is associated with an acute viral syndrome. Clinically, these symptoms are similar to those of any other acute viral illness – fever, sore throat, fatigue, weight loss, and myalgia. The clinical signs of HIV infection include skin rash, lymphadenopathy, splenomegaly, arthritis, and less frequently, aseptic meningitis. In infants, clinical signs and symptoms of HIV infections occur less frequently.

From a public health perspective, the identification of individuals with acute or early infection is extremely important. People need to be informed about their medical treatment options and how they can prevent the further spread of infection. HIV viral load, the amount of HIV circulating in the blood, can be very high in the first few weeks of infection. Some studies suggest that early treatment to suppress viral replication may affect the future course of disease. In addition, in order to prevent transmission, counselling and education about high-risk behaviours are essential during this stage of HIV disease. Viral load can be very high in genital secretions during early HIV infection, yet because people feel healthy, they may engage in behaviours that continue to spread infection.

In order to better understand the events occurring during acute and early infection, we want to explore the possibility to establish an European network, focused on the mechanisms of HIV infection and will use interventions in the acute and early phases of HIV infection to gain more information about the pathogenesis and treatment of HIV disease.

PURPOSE

The goal of this initiative is to build an European network of HIV Acute Infection and Early Disease Research Units through scientific collaboration agreements. Each awarded unit will perform innovative, integrated, investigator-initiated pathogenesis and clinical research on acute (i.e., within one month post initial infection) and early (i.e., up to 12 months post initial infection) HIV-1 infection. The multi-unit format (Network) is required to enrol sufficient numbers of these hard-to-identify patients for study.
SCIENTIFIC CONTENTS OF THE WORKSHOP

G. Tambussi welcomed the attendees and gave a brief introduction underlining the main objectives of the meeting. Subsequently, Dr. C. Moquin-Pattey clearly illustrated the research tools available through ESF, and suggested different ways to approach such tools and how to properly meet the Foundation requirements for the applications.

Since Prof. Weber was not able to participate in the meeting, his lecture was divided into two distinct parts. Prof Phillips gave an outstanding introductory speech on the relevance of conducting controlled clinical trials. Then Prof. Babiker exhaustively explained the model of the SPARTC trial, showing the possibility to establish a large international network on primary HIV infection, involving a large number of investigators worldwide.

The convenor chaired the first session (Prof. Clumeck was absent). The session was focused on two large collaborative international networks that have been set up in order to study different aspects of primary HIV infection. Dr. Porter illustrated the CASCADE project, funded by the European Community, focused on the epidemiological surveillance of early-acute infections in Europe. Dr. Kinlock-de Loes, showed the result of a clinical trial, the QUEST study, that has been carried out worldwide and that has involved several investigator present at the meeting. Prof Emilie, presented the preliminary data of INTERPRIM study, a randomized study carried out in France and aimed at understanding whether or not Interferon alfa can be used to purge the latently infected cells reservoirs. Finally, Dr. D’Offizzi presented the final results of a study conducted in Italy, and stressed the challenge of performing clear diagnosis of primary infection and then to recruit these patients in clinical trials.

After the coffee break, Prof Phillips gave a very comprehensive lecture on laboratory tests available for the study of the immune response, particularly focused on the assays that can be utilized to understand the dynamics of the interaction between the host and the virus during the early phases of the HIV infection.

Dr. Yerly chaired the second session. Dr. Marchetti gave an interesting talk on immune surrogate markers that can be used to monitor antiviral therapy, while Dr. Gori showed the results of two studies that were carried out on patients with primary HIV infection. Prof Chiodi speech was focused on the results of studies on both B and NK cells dynamics during primary HIV Infection.

The last session “National programs on PHI”, was chaired by Prof. D’Arminio. Dr. Meyer, Dr. Mirò-Meda and Dr. Stellbrink, presented the France, Spain and Germany programmes on
primary HIV infection, and clearly showed the capability to build efficient National programmes, but also they have underlined the need to join the efforts in order to reach a reasonable number of patients and to have the chance to design randomized clinical trials. Given the delay due to very interesting discussions after each session, Dr. Tambussi postponed his talk to the afternoon round table.

After lunch, the round tabled was chaired by the convenor. Unfortunately, a strike of the public ground transportation in Italy, forced to shorten the schedule of the round table. Just before leaving, Dr. Moquin-Pattee assured her full support to help the group to define the best tool within those available in the ESF research programmes to attain this end.

Dr. Tambussi skipped his talk and made an official proposal to set up a stable European collaborative research group. This proposal stimulated a very interesting discussion about the possible strategies to achieve this.

ASSESSMENT OF THE RESULTS, CONTRIBUTION TTO FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF THE FIELD

All attendees agreed to support the main objective of the workshop, i.e. to build a network HIV primary HIV infection and early disease Research Units in Europe.

Unlike many other major cooperative research projects, the structure of the groups and funding should not be linked to a specific experiment or clinical trial. Thus this mechanism has the potential for considerable flexibility in resource allocation which will facilitate the rapid testing of hypotheses about the pathogenesis of HIV infection and early phase clinical trials of promising treatments of acute/early HIV infection.

The multi year nature of a program announcement provides additional and necessary flexibility to allow the support for the scientific capability to expand and keep pace, as warranted, with this emerging, rapidly developing and high priority area of HIV-related research.

The participants authorized the convenor to explore, on behalf of each of them, the grant opportunities in this specific field.
FINAL PROGRAMME

Thursday 5 October 2006
Evening Arrival

Friday 6 October 2006
08.30 Welcome - Giuseppe Tambussi
08.35 Presentation of the European Science Foundation (ESF)
   C. Moquin-Pattey (Standing Committee for European Medical Research Councils)
08.45 Lecture: Should We Treat Acute HIV Infection? – Rodeny Phillips/Abdel Babiker

Session 1: Setting up networks for studies and trials in PHI
   Chairman: Giuseppe tambussi
09.05 The CASCADE project - Kholoud Porter
09.20 The QUEST trial - Sabine Kinloch-de Loes
09.35 Existing international networks: the SPARTAC model - Abdel Babiker
09.50 The management of PHI patients in clinical trials - Gianpiero D'Ofizi
10.05 The ANRS Intreprim trial – Dominique Emilie
   Discussion
10.30 Coffee break
10.30 Lecture: HIV specific cellular immune responses in PHI - Rodney Phillips

Session 2: Highly standardized research lab collaborations across Europe
   Chairman: Sabine Yerly
10.50 Immune surrogate markers and disease progression – Giulia Marchetti
11.15 Model of research lab network in Italy - Andrea Gori
11.30 The Swedish-Italian collaboration - Francesca Chiodi
   Discussion

Session 3: National programs on PHI
   Chairman: Antonella d’Arminio Monforte
12.00 France: the PRIMO cohort – Laurence Meyer
12.15 Spain - José Maria Miro Meda
12.30 Germany - Hans-Jürgen Stellbrink
   Discussion
13.30 Lunch

14.30 Round table: Are we paving the road to an European network on PHI?
   Chairs: Giuseppe Tambussi ALL
   Departure
STATISTICAL INFORMATION ON PARTICIPATION

Total number of attendees: 16

Total number of attendees per country: 6 Italy; 4 United Kingdom; 2 France; 1 Germany; 1 Spain; 1 Sweden; 1 Switzerland.

M/F ratio: 10/6

Age: 25-35 (1); 36-45 (2); 46-55 (9); 56-65 (4);
FINAL LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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