

**European Commission funded project:
'Cerebellar cortical control: cells, circuits, computation and clinic'**

A group of European researchers have been awarded a large grant by the European Commission to study the cerebellum. They held their first meeting in March and Julie Greenfield, Ataxia UK's Research Project Manager, attended as a euro-ATAXIA representative. Euro-ATAXIA and the German charity DHAG are named partners in this project. A patient representative from DHAG also attended.

Introduction

This project involves nine groups from Institutions around Europe and it was successful in getting funding from a Training funding stream of the European Commission called Marie-Curie, thus a major focus is on training of PhD students in different techniques and integrating research in academic setting with industry. The overall aim of this project is increasing our understanding of the cerebellum. The programme runs for four years and the budget is 3.6 million euros. Although it involves some clinical work the emphasis is on basic research.

Projects

The majority of the research to be carried out in this programme involves understanding how the cerebellum works and which parts of the cerebellum are involved in different functions. Some researchers will be working on understanding what happens at the cellular level and others will focus on how the neural networks work and involve computer modelling work. There are projects dissecting the coordination of eye movements, arm movements, and individual finger movements, and how these are disrupted in people with cerebellar ataxia.

One clinician in Germany will be doing a physiotherapy intervention trial in people with cerebellar ataxia and try and relate the effect of the exercises on changes seen within the cerebellum. In collaboration with researchers in the UK they will also do a study of people who had had cerebellar lesions after a stroke and see how their recovery in time can be related to changes within the cerebellum to identify which parts of the cerebellum are showing changes as a result of recovery. This may have implications for patients with degenerative cerebellar ataxias too.

For more information on the project visit the website: www.cerebellumc7.eu

Outreach discussion

A very useful discussion was held on the types of outreach activities that could be done. Outreach activities are an integral training aim for the young researchers and there is some funding for this. The countries involved in this project are the following: Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Israel and UK.

Everyone agreed that Ataxia Awareness Day would be a good time to raise awareness of this project and ataxia research. Each university from the countries



taking part in this project agreed to organise an event in September 2011. It was also important to involve the press in order to get information out to the general public, so press releases on each project should be ready in advance. Attendance at the annual euro-ATAXIA meetings would be a good way of disseminating information to people with ataxia around Europe as well as presentations at national ataxia charity meetings (or local branch meetings). The importance of having lay summaries of the scientific projects on the website was also highlighted together with information on why the research is important to patients.

Conclusions

This was a very informative initial meeting with plenty of time for discussion. The project should yield much useful information on how the cerebellum works and what goes wrong in people with cerebellar ataxia. Patient representation and input is very welcome. For more information on how to get involved contact Dr Joern Diedrichsen who is working at University College London (j.diedrichsen@ucl.ac.uk).

For more support or information please contact: Ataxia UK, Lincoln House, Kennington Park, 1 – 3 Brixton Road. London SW9 6DE

Website: www.ataxia.org.uk.

Helpline: 0845 644 0606 **Tel:** +44 (0)20 7582 1444 **Fax:** +44 (0)20 7582 9444

Email: helpline@ataxia.org.uk.