Establishing Common Standards for Postgraduate Professional Training in Pharmacology: the Example of the EPHAR EuCP Programme

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Background: In many countries world-wide, pharmacologists have raised concerns that pharmacology as a discipline is under threats of disappearing. Departments of pharmacology have been abolished or merged with other units to form larger entities and in many cases not even the former laboratories have retained their distinction as pharmacological units. The new European Certified Pharmacologist (EuCP) scheme of EPHAR is intended to provide a distinctly visible documentation which certifies that bearers excel in standards of education, skills, experience and professional standing in pharmacology.

Development: The structure of the certification is based on the European Registered Toxicologist (ERT) program of EUROTOX. Draft guidelines for the EPHAR program were prepared by a dedicated subcommittee of EPHAR. All member societies of EPHAR were invited to a 2-day workshop held in Utrecht, the Netherlands, on 27–28 March 2014 to discuss and work on a final document. Twenty-one of EPHAR's 27 member societies (i.e. 78%) sent delegates to this workshop. The final guidelines were sent to all member societies for formal approval of the EuCP program. As of 16 Feb 2015, seventeen member societies (i.e. 63%) have formally adopted the program with further societies having sent notices to respond when their regular executive committee and/or general assembly meetings will be held later this year.

Participating countries (as of 30 June 2014) with numbers of individual members represented by the respective national pharmacological society:

Austria	181		**Netherlands**	160	
Croatia	188		**Norway**	163	
Czech Rep.	218		**Poland**	333	
Finland	550		**Portugal**	160	
France	420		**Serbia**	110	
Germany	848		**Slovenia**	30	
Greece	210		**Spain**	731	
Hungary	163		**Turkey**	685	
Italy	1,086				

TOTAL (15 societies) **6,236**

17 out of 27 member societies participating: **63%**
representing
6,236 of ~10,000 individual members: **62%**

(Numbers for individual members given on the basis of payments of annual membership dues of these societies in 2013)

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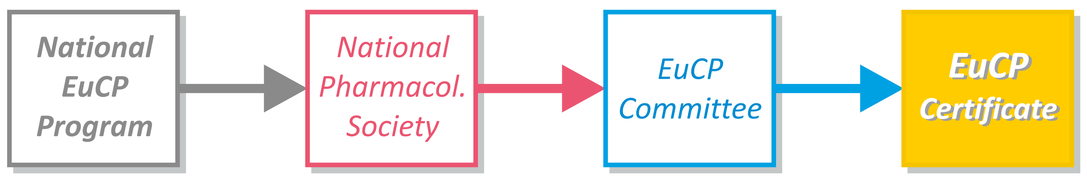
Certification procedure: The national pharmacology society is responsible for the evaluation of all documents provided by the individual applicant. National EuCP programs can be based on pre-existing certifications or diplomas or can be set up anew. A diploma program of an external body (e.g. a Medical Chamber or similar) must be validated by the society and checked whether this fulfils all EuCP criteria. National EuCP programs will be validated and accredited by the EuCP Committee (five members). Once the national program is accredited, applicants checked by the participating society will be named to the EuCP Committee which issues the EuCP diploma (with a period of validity of five years).



Recertification: EuCPs shall re-affirm their certification credentials on a five-year basis by supplying documentation of the continued professional practice and continuing professional development.

Requirements for certification include:

* **Academic degree** (MD, PhD, Msc or equivalent)
* **Knowledge** of the major areas of Pharmacology
* **Documentation** of training (theoretical and practical)
* **Active membership** in the national society of pharmacology
* **At least 5 years** of pharmacological experience
* **Current professional engagement** in pharmacology
* **Contribution proven** by publications, reports etc.

Training requirements: Requirements for training schemes include fields of theoretical knowledge, practical awareness and practical skills. Given the large diversity of the general field of pharmacology, these are grouped into compulsory and elective items.

Theoretical Training	*Practical Awareness*	*Practical Skills*
Compulsory topics: *basic knowlege of the major areas of pharmacology*	***Mandatory:*** *in at least half of all major techniques in pharmacology (defined as knowledge about techniques, merits and limitations)*	***Mandatory:*** *in-depth knowledge and experience in at least two of the major technical areas*
Elective topics *may be added*		

Present and Future:

The current project has already gained recognition by EMTRAIN and LifeTrain, subprojects of the European Union's Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) which aims at improving the research environment in all sciences involved in medicines research and supporting European science in this broad field in the context of world-wide competition. The EuCP project also shall assist European pharmacological societies in setting up appropriate training opportunities for potential EuCP candidates and implementing or providing opportunities for continuing professional development.

EuCP Guidelines: http://www.ephar.org/eucp