EU Policy Symposium 2 Report

Empowering Tomorrow – The Nuclear Medicine Community Strategic Role within EU Projects and Tenders on Workforce

The second EANM Annual Congress EU Policy Symposium, organised by the Policy & Regulatory Affairs Council (PRAC) took place in Hamburg on 22 October 2024. It **centred on engagement in EU projects and tenders**. By showcasing the outcomes of these initiatives, speakers and panelists explored both the critical challenges of cultivating a skilled Nuclear Medicine workforce and the evolving EU funding landscape.

Words of the Co-Chairs

"We were honoured to lead the dynamic discussions and benefit from the valuable insights shared during this symposium. As co-chairs, we recognise the critical importance of addressing workforce challenges and ensuring equitable access to specialised training, particularly in a rapidly evolving field like nuclear medicine. This symposium highlighted the strategic opportunities presented by EU funding initiatives and the necessity of fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration to increase policy impact.

By aligning our efforts with broader EU priorities, we can collectively strengthen the foundation for a skilled nuclear medicine workforce. We thank all participants for their contributions and look forward to continued collaboration."

Michel Koole & Tim Van den Wyngaert

Against the backdrop of a newly starting EU mandate with shifting political priorities, co-chairs Michel Koole, EANM Scientific Liaison Officer, and Tim Van den Wyngaert, Chair of EANM's Young Professionals Council, highlighted the crucial role of healthcare professional societies in supporting sustainable projects while aiming to increase policy impact through collaboration at all levels.

Setting the scene: the importance of EU projects for professional societies

Richard Price, Head of Policy, European Cancer Organisation

Richard Price **highlighted the importance of EU projects in advancing cancer policy and initiatives**. Reflecting on political shifts, Price noted **the focus of the 2019-2024 European Commission on health as a unifying priority**, resulting in Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, launched in 2021 with a €4 billion budget from EU programmes.

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan has sparked significant advancements across European nations, motivating many to establish or improve national cancer strategies aligned with the EU's cancer care vision. However, **sustaining these initiatives requires accountability and a commitment to measurable results**. EU projects and tenders play a crucial role in implementing Europe's Beating Cancer Plan by funding innovative research, prevention programs, and health infrastructure improvements across Member States. They foster cross-border collaboration and ensure equitable access to resources, enabling effective cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment.

🔍 Key points:

- EU projects have a greater likelihood of success in achieving policy changes if they are supported by professional societies.
- Expanding the Beating Cancer Plan's foundation to address broader health issues (mental health, cardiovascular diseases, etc.), could help to foster a more integrated EU health policy.

RLT Academy: an ERASMUS + project to develop a first of its kind RLT training opportunity

Christophe Deroose, RLT Academy, Consortium Coordinator and professor at KU Leuven

Professor Christophe Deroose introduced the RLT Academy, an innovative ERASMUS+ project **aimed at establishing the first comprehensive training programme for radioligand therapy** (RLT). The consortium's aim was to facilitate the education about radioligand therapies in Europe and bridge the educational gap among healthcare professionals.

After identifying the target groups and relevant content gaps to be closed, the consortium created a structured, transnational, and multidisciplinary education programme focusing on the use of RLTs for interested healthcare professionals. The training programme was delivered in a blended, free-of-charge, open-access format format and had a strong virtual as well as physical (clinical) training aspect. t was aimed at filling the current knowledge gap on RLTs and strengthening the multidisciplinary cooperation between oncologists, nuclear medicine specialists and other relevant professionals.

Policy Recommendations and Obstacles to broader RLT Adoption

Through its innovative approach, RLT has the potential to create a true paradigm shift and become the new pillar of cancer care. Adoption of this treatment will transform patient outcomes and contribute to a more successful EU-level effort at combatting cancer, but only if it is properly adapted into mainstream cancer care. This cannot be done without first laying the foundations through proper education and training a new generation of healthcare professionals who can integrate RLTs in their ongoing practices.

The project advised policymakers on addressing the complex barriers RLTs face in Europe through a set of policy recommendations.

Key Area	Recommendations
Research and Development	• Secure funding for pre-clinical and clinical research in radioligand therapies. • Ensure a reliable supply of essential ligands and radionuclides. • Establish a fast-track approval process for early-phase clinical trials.
Recognition of Clinical Interest	• Expand the therapeutic window of RLTs to increase treatment efficacy. • Accelerate regulatory approvals for new radioligand therapies. • Promote the diffusion of RLT advancements within the healthcare community.
Referral and Multidisciplinary Networks	• Ensure multidisciplinary education, providing peer accreditation across levels of expertise. • Develop and share online guidelines for the safe, high-quality application of RLT, covering the entire process from research to patient care. • Monitor the real-world use and efficacy of RLTs to support ongoing evaluation and improvements.
Healthcare Policies	• Increase the number of accredited RLT centres across Europe. • Establish independent bodies to oversee reimbursement policies for radiopharmaceuticals. • Integrate RLT as a critical component in the national cancer plans of each EU Member State.

Ultimately, the consortium of the RLT Academy hopes to improve European cancer care so that patients may access this promising treatment option regardless of their place of living.

European Union Radiation, Education, Staffing & Training

Francois Jamar, Deputy Head of Nuclear Medicine Department, UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium

Francois Jamar introduced the European Union Radiation, Education, Staffing & Training (EU-REST) study. This **tender aimed to assess and address workforce availability, education, and training needs to ensure quality and safety aspects of medical applications involving ionising radiation in the EU.**

Education & Training

Jamar highlighted that there are very considerable differences in the professional recognition, education/training, duration and qualification of nuclear medicine physicians across the 27 Member States creating major challenges that need to be overcome in the future.

The consortium developed education / training guidelines for relevant professional groups, including:

- Establishing a **knowledgeable status of the current curriculum** for the specialty of **Nuclear Medicine,**
- **Harmonising the curriculum** amongst the EU27, taking into consideration differences in equipment and Gross Domestic Product between the Member States,
- **Organising practical cross-country mobility** to grant all medical doctors in the EU27 equal access to the specialty of Nuclear Medicine.

Staffing

Defining the workforce and needs for nuclear medicine (NM) physicians across the EU27 is a difficult, if not impossible task. This is mainly due to **varying definitions of the Nuclear Medicine specialty** across Europe, and the huge differences in training and education. F. Jamar proposed a core European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS) syllabus as a standard curriculum, with optional European School of Multimodality Imaging & Therapy (ESMIT) training.

The consortium agreed that Nuclear Medicine is rapidly evolving, and the staffing needs will undoubtedly change, with growing indications of hybrid imaging and the recent explosion of radionuclide therapy, especially using radioligands.
However, the consortium was confronted with **non-reliable and inconsistent data**, obstructing efforts to develop a coherent workforce strategy.

🔍 Main challenges identified by EUREST

- Training inconsistencies across Nuclear Medicine professions.
- Lack of accurate workforce data.
- Ageing workforce.
- Bureaucratic constraints may leave the project as just a list of intended outcomes.

In this respect, it is recommended that the already existing tool, such as the IAEA's IRIS tool be confronted with actual data to evaluate its reliability in terms of resources, at local level, i.e., individual institutions, as a potential separate follow-up action upon completion of the EU-REST study.

Stay tuned for the publication of the final guidelines!

INTERACT-EUROPE & INTERACT-EUROPE 100

Paola Erba, EANM, President-Elect 2023-2024

Paola Erba presented on the INTERACT-EUROPE and INTERACT-EUROPE 100 projects, **which aim** at facilitating a **high-functioning multidisciplinary cancer care** across Europe. Coordinated by the European Cancer Organisation, these projects are part of the implementation of the EU's Beating Cancer Plan

INTERACT-EUROPE, which ran from June 2022 until December 2023, had the **main objective of developing a European inter-specialty cancer training programme involving all main oncology disciplines and professions,** cancer centers and patient groups, based on relevant needs assessments.

🔍 INTERACT vision:
INTERACT-EUROPE has a clear and unwavering objective: improve cancer care by improving the collaboration of those providing it. The INTERACT-EUROPE vision is all about breaking down medical silos. It provides professionals from different specialties with the skills to communicate with each other more effectively for better patient care

The curriculum integrated technology-enhanced learning to make standardised training widely accessible across disciplines. The project has fostered a patient-centric approach to quality cancer care through the promotion of multi-disciplinary and multi-professional team working.

Building on this foundation, INTERACT-EUROPE 100 has been launched in February 2024 and will run until November 2026, with the aim of deploying the inter-specialty cancer training in cancer centers. INTERACT-EUROPE 100's goals include implementing a digital learning management system for oncology professionals, a "training the trainers" concept in at least 100 cancer centers with modules on paediatric and displaced persons.

Finally, Erba highlighted **EANM's role in highlighting the importance of RLT within INTERACT.**

Panel Discussion

What are the forthcoming funding opportunities for Nuclear Medicine? How to develop successful proposals and foster the role of Nuclear Medicine in upcoming projects?

The panel discussion explored practical approaches for developing successful proposals, addressing workforce challenges, enhancing professional collaboration, and advocating for nuclear medicine at the EU level. In the table, each recommendation is paired with insights from individual speakers, highlighting their perspectives. This overview provides a **roadmap for the nuclear medicine community to navigate funding opportunities and policy influence more effectively**.

This panel discussion included the additional presence of Margarida Goulart, Head of the Euratom Coordination Unit of the Joint Research Centre; Monika Hierath, Executive Manager at European Institute for Biomedical Imaging Research; and Konrade von Bremen, Vice President, EU affairs representative and Treasurer of Nuclear Medicine Europe.

Recommendation	Speaker	Key Insights
Ensure Sustainable Funding and EU Programme Involvement	Richard Price, Michel Koole	- Price advocated for sustainable funding with early decision-makers´ involvement to support long-term projects. - Koole highlighted short timelines and funding limitations, suggesting clearer communication of project value.
Establish an EU Workforce Observatory	Francois Jamar, Margarida Goulart	- Goulart and Jamar advocated for strengthening the observatory for nuclear skills with a focus on medical applications of ionising radiation.
Increase Youth Engagement in Nuclear Medicine Research	Francois Jamar	- Jamar emphasised the importance of early-career professionals taking on PI roles in EU funded projects.
Strengthen Professional Collaboration and Communication	Francois Jamar, Monika Hierath	- Highlighting the need for the healthcare professionals to be more informed about funding opportunities, Jamar suggested that professional societies should better communicate about these opportunities to their community. - Hierath supported strengthening the collaboration between professionals' societies and the UEMS to build a registry on workforce in the medical applications of ionising radiation.
Enhance Training Flexibility and Specialisation	Paola Erba	- Erba advocated for a balanced approach in RL therapy training, integrating general oncology and nuclear elements to meet varying role requirements.
Increase Nuclear Medicine Representation in EU Research Networks	Konrade von Bremen	- Von Bremen emphasised the importance of establishing an EU network of experts, ensuring substantial participation in order to enhance the visibility and influence of the nuclear medicine community in forthcoming projects.

Key Policy Recommendations

1. Calling healthcare professional societies and organisations to **engage with the European Commission to secure funding for projects** that ensure consistent, long-term, and sustainable resources while streamlining administrative processes.

2. Calling HCP societies to actively **encourage healthcare professionals to assume leadership roles in EU-funded projects**, such as by encouraging them to participate in expert advisory positions to offer valuable insights and guidance, thereby enhancing EU-funded projects' relevance and impact.

3. Calling HCP societies to address training inconsistencies by **developing a core syllabus**, such as one by the European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS), as a **standard curriculum across Europe**, complemented by optional training through organisations like ESMIT. This standardisation will ensure consistent knowledge and skills among different nuclear medicine professional status across Member States.

4. Calling all stakeholders across Europe to **agree on accurate, EU-wide workforce data collection methodology** to support effective planning and strategy development. Reliable data is essential for creating coherent workforce strategies, enabling better resource allocation, and responding proactively to emerging needs in the healthcare sector.

5. Calling EU institutions to establish a **specialised unit** within the **European Observatory of Nuclear Skills** dedicated to the **medical applications of ionising radiation**, ensuring a focused approach to addressing the specific needs and challenges in Nuclear Medicine.