

PRESS RELEASE

European experts gather to share advances in infectious disease research

29 June, 2005: Winchester, UK: Over 200 scientific experts from throughout Europe will meet for the next three days in Winchester to discuss state-of-the-art advances in infectious disease (zoonotic) research.

The scientists are all members of Med-Vet-Net, the European Network of Excellence for Zoonoses research, which is holding its first General scientific meeting at King Alfred College in Winchester, UK.

The Network commenced in September 2004 and is funded for five years by the European Union (EU) 6th Framework Programme, within the 'Quality and Safety of Food' Priority Area.

Med-Vet-Net comprises 16 partners across Europe and integrates veterinary, medical and food science research on infectious diseases transmitted from animals to man, known as zoonoses. The Network includes the foremost research groups working on zoonoses in Europe. The majority of partners have responsibilities for provision of advice and consultancy to their respective national governments on aspects of human health risks, animal diseases and welfare, and food safety.

This first meeting will allow scientists to share their collaborative research findings from the first year of the project. Parallel sessions will examine topics relating to epidemiology and risk assessment, host-microbe interactions, detection and control, as well new, emerging, orphan and topical zoonoses. Keynote speakers are Prof. Corrie Brown from the College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia, USA who will discuss 'Zoonotic diseases: Lessons from the past' and Prof. Nina Marano, Associate Director for Veterinary Medicine & Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, Atlanta, USA who will speak about 'Future international challenges in zoonotic diseases'.

The pooling of scientific expertise of all institutes is creating critical masses of knowledge and experience, increasing advice and research capability and the ability to respond to emergency situations world-wide. During the project it is anticipated that solid and sustainable links will be forged between scientists and institutes by the creation of common collections/reference strain sets and databases, the shared use of equipment and technical platforms, and the creation of harmonised and standardised protocols for the detection and typing of zoonotic agents.

Med-Vet-Net expertise is available from doctors and medical scientists who identify human diseases, epidemiologists and risk analysts who establish links with animals, microbiologists who confirm those links and veterinary and food scientists responsible for the control and prevention of the risks. Such a multi-disciplinary approach is enabling knowledge to be shared across regional, national and international borders.

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More about zoonoses:

Infectious diseases remain a major public health concern worldwide, causing over 14 million deaths per annum (WHO). Of the 1415 species of infectious agents known to be pathogenic to humans, about 61% are able to be transmitted from animals to humans. These 'zoonotic'

diseases include Salmonella in eggs, Campylobacter in poultry meat, Cryptosporidium in water as well as rabies, bird flu and West Nile virus.

The occurrence of zoonotic diseases is increasing worldwide, due to increasing global travel, greater international livestock trade, increasing encroachment of man and livestock into previously uninhabited habitats, and changes in livestock production.

The role of animals, including wildlife, as reservoirs of potential and existing public health problems, transmitted via food or other routes is an area that requires monitoring and continued research. In addition to the human pain and misery caused by these diseases, the cost to the EU is well in excess of €6bn/yr.

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