



777/EuSANH-46

Minutes

of the second conference of the European Science Advisory Network for Health (EuSANH) on 29 and 30 November 2007 in Luxembourg

Those present

Guy de Backer (SHC, BE), Yves Dumont (DG Research), Ingemar Eckerlund (SBU, SE), Leonie Leliveld (NL), Hans Houweling (GR, NL), Mike Kelly (NICE, UK), André Knottnerus (GR, NL), Djien Liem (EFSA, IT), Marina Marini (DG SANCO, BE), Henry Metz (FEAM, LU), Nico de Neeling (GR, NL), Ellen Nolte (LSHTM, UK), Emmanuel Nouyrigat (HAS, FR), André Pauwels (SHC, BE), Isidore Pelc (SHC, BE), Govin Permanand (WHO Europe, DK), Ritva Prättälä (KTL, FI), José Robalo (PT), John Ryan (DG Sanco, LU), Antonio Sarría (ISCI, ES), Jonathan Suk (ECDC, SE), Mirosław Wysocki (NIPH/NIH, PL), Philippe Roux (DG Sanco, LU), Jonathan Price (DG Sanco, LU) and Jürgen Schefflein (DG Sanco, LU).

EuSANH secretariat: Dorine Coenen (NL), Senol Levent (NL), Irene Vianello (NL)

Apologies: Peter Kolominsky-Rabas (IQWiG, DE), Jaroslav Volf (CZ), Robin Fears (EASAC)

Summary

The second EuSANH conference was opened by Dr John Ryan, Unit Health Threats of the Health and Consumer Protection Directorate General. The major part of the meeting was dedicated to the exchange of methodological aspects of science advice. Staff members presented specific advisory projects from their organisations emphasizing methodological aspects used. The participants concluded that exchange and collaboration on the methodology of constructing science advisory reports (both in retrospect *and* prospectively) is a major added value for EuSANH (and the EC).

An inventory on evidence-based science advisory reports on diabetes resulted in three comparable guidelines of different EU countries constructed at the same time without relevant exchange and international collaboration. This emphasized the importance to exchange national work programmes and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts on the same health topics. Sinapse can play an important role in the exchange of this information.

All participants were positive for further continuation of EuSANH activities, and for re-submitting of a Call for Proposal to strengthen the network and develop a common methodological framework to support collaboration in the science advice on transnational health topics.



Thursday 29 November

André Knottnerus opened the Thursday evening meeting by welcoming all participants at the 2nd EuSANH conference.

Follow-up Diabetes project

This EuSANH pilot project that started in 2006 by comparing the different policy approaches in Finland and the Netherlands was continued by an inventory on science advisory reports on obesity and type 2 diabetes. This inventory resulted in eleven science advisory reports from six Member States focusing on prevention and treatment of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Review of the quality of three reports on obesity prepared by three EuSANH member countries in the same time period resulted in comparable methodological aspects such as the use of systematic literature searches and external review panels. The importance to know from each other that science advisory reports of similar topics are being prepared was emphasized. Sinapse can play an important role in this exchange of reports and/or work programmes and can complement our systems for literature search.

Suggestions whether this Diabetes project should be continued (for instance an online consultation via Sinapse to retrieve more reports and synthesis of this information) are requested.

Results of EuSANH project proposal submitted to DG Sanco and follow-up

It was decided to resubmit a Call for Proposals under the condition that the Work Programme 2008 of DG Sanco (PHP) or DG Research (FP7) includes such a topic. The feasibility, and partnership of the EuSANH members, will be investigated shortly. To improve a new proposal and increase our chances on success, the consolidated Evaluation of the previous proposals in 2007 will be discussed with staff members of PHEA and DG Sanco.

EuSANH Webpage and Sinapse

Participants already using the Sinapse e-communication system for uploading of documents or notification are positive on the system. It is however emphasized that more dissemination is needed. Via a recently launched EuSANH webpage (<http://eusanh.eu>), both the secured members section and the Public library of the EuSANH community of Sinapse can now be easily assessed. A quick guide how to use the website will be prepared and distributed shortly.

Friday 30 November 2007

Opening speech

John Ryan, head of the Unit Health Threats of the Health and Consumer protection Directorate General opened the Friday meeting by welcoming the participant in the premises of the European Commission in Luxemburg. Ryan recalled his first contacts with the Dutch and Belgian Health Councils some years ago, when they explored how the expertise and experiences of the national advisory structures could be used to support each other and to support European health policy. This resulted in the foundation of



EuSANH in 2006. Ryan demanded attention for collaborative fine-tuning with European priorities and planning which match with national ambitions. He referred for instance to the recently published white paper on nutrition, overweight and obesity-related health issues and the white paper on Health Strategy which closely reflects the EuSANH standpoint regarding the fact that policy should be based on the best scientific evidence derived from sound data. Finally, he asked attention for the new Public Health Action Programme (2008-2013) that will come into force in January 2008. The first Call for Proposals is expected in February 2008.

As science itself, science advice can (should) only be convincing when based on solid methodology.

With this phrase, André Knottnerus introduced the session on the exchange of methodological aspects of science advice of EuSANH member organisations. A first analysis on forty-two science advisory reports of these organisations revealed similarities but also many differences. These included amongst others the language of the report (many not English), origin and justification of the question, variety in methodology aspects, expert judgement, stakeholders and peer review, recommendations for implementation, project planning (three projects on stop smoking in 3 countries performed at the same time without relevant exchange and international collaboration!) and procedures to safeguard independence.

Six presentations of staff members of different EuSANH organizations on methodological elements of concrete advisory reports provided more insight in these similarities and differences. How to deal with the lack of evidence, transparency on uncertainties/assumptions, routine use of public consultations, advantages and risks of the input of stake holders' analysis, implementation and field testing, and peer review procedures are interesting elements to exchange and discuss.

It was concluded that the exchange and collaboration on the methodology of constructing science advisory reports (both in retrospect *and* prospectively) is a major added value for EuSANH (and the EC). EuSANH should start to work on a common methodological framework for the construction of science advisory reports.

A proposal for publication on methodological aspects of science advice based on the input given in this conference and previous work on this topic prepared by this group can be a first output.

Organisational and financial aspects of the network

As the Dutch Ministry of Health financially has been supporting the EuSANH initiative, the Health Council has naturally taken up the roles of chairperson and secretariat from the start. Since this financial support will stop, it is time to share financial aspects. To facilitate mutual involvement of participants and balanced development of EuSANH, a rotation scheme for the secretariat and chairperson is also proposed.

All participants were in positive of the continuation of EuSANH activities and members agreed with the idea of an annual membership fee and rotation of chair and secretariat and will discuss this at their home institutions. The secretariat will prepare a proposal for this.



Conclusions and further actions

Knottnerus summarised the conference by providing the following concluding points

Collaboration on methodological aspects of science advice both in retrospect **and** prospectively is an important added value for EuSANH members. A collaborative document for publication on these aspects also based on the input in the conference will be prepared and circulated. *Action: Health Council of the Netherlands*

It was decided to resubmit a Call for Proposals under the condition that the Work Programme 2008 of DG Sanco (PHP) or DG Research (FP7) includes such a topic. The feasibility, and type of partnership (main, associated or collaborating partner) of the EuSANH members will be investigated shortly. *All members are invited to indicate their partnership.*

Participants are positive to consider possibilities for structural financing the continuation of the basic activities of the EuSANH secretariat when the financial support of the Dutch Ministry of Health stops (end 2008). This would also emphasize the independence of the network. *A proposal on the organisational aspects to request a formal annual membership fee will be prepared by the secretariat.*

Potential subject matter related advisory project of future collaboration could be for instance:

- extending the work on diabetes;
- socio economic health differences in the EU (not so covered by ECDC and EFSA) in close collaboration with WHO;
- International work shop on toxicological risk assessment (in cooperation with planned conference activities of DG Sanco (M Marina) on this issue), for those EuSANH organizations also covering occupational and environmental health

Via an easily accessible EuSANH web page, both the secured members section of EuSANH and the Public library of the EuSANH website on Sinapse can now be accessed (<http://www.eusanh.eu>). The Sinapse e-communication system will play an important role in the exchange of reports and/or work programmes, as many advisory reports can not be retrieved from on-line databases as Medline. To facilitate this exchange at least the summaries of relevant national advisory reports and work programmes should be made available in the English language. A quick guide how to use the website will be distributed shortly.- *Participants are invited to perform their own translations and to actively use this e-communication system.*

A proposal for the topic and location of the next EuSANH conference will be prepared by the EuSANH secretariat. *Anticipating on the next EuSANH meeting all participants are invited to provide their suggestions and remarks on the organisation of the meeting to the secretariat.*