Springtime in European Addiction Research

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Although the commitment to addiction research as well as the resources are distributed unevenly throughout the nations and although by far the greater part of empirical studies are done in the United States, recently established research centres and research teams and the increased efforts on the European level are beginning to bear fruit. European addiction research is starting to play quite an original and distinctive role in this field of research, which can be seen by several papers in this number. Independent research networks are developing, e.g. the one around the European Monitoring Centre in Lisbon or the EASAR, an association of independent addiction research institutes in Europe; the number of scientists committed to addiction research as well as the number of internationally relevant studies is increasing. They are greatly assisted by the existing institutes and university departments. There are also important new developments like the Addiction Research Institute in Zurich, which was decisively involved in the Zurich study of heroin prescription. Germany is the only country that seems to be reluctant to make similar efforts towards institutionalisation.

However, this does not stop German scientists from submitting interesting and important studies made possible by outside financing like the studies by Wittchen et al. on the early stages of drug consumption, which will be the special topic of the next issue of European Addiction Research. The development of addiction research is also furthered by the increasing interest in clinically very important areas like studies concerning comorbidity of harmful consumption of psychotropic substances and severe mental disorders – which had already been a ‘special topic’ of this journal – to which the paper by Eland-Goossensen is a very interesting contribution. The extension towards medically indicated prescription of opiates brings us to another internationally innovative field under close observation, which is attracting a great amount of attention. Following the completion of the Zurich study, the synthesis of which is presented in this number, similar studies will be carried out in the Netherlands next year. Wim van den Brink will be in charge of this second extensive European opiate study, and we will endeavour to keep our colleagues informed on the state of this research project.

This research and treatment approach attracts intensive and controversial discussions comparable to those about the harm reduction issue. It is a satisfying experience to witness how controversial discussions can be conducted on a high level as done in Helge Waal’s analysis of a paper by Buning and van Brussel. Mutual references and constructive discussions of controversial positions are one of the main pathways to intellectual and scientific progress. If possible, more space shall be dedicated to this kind of debate in this journal.

The interdisciplinary profile of research is also adequately taken into account. Thus, the legal and social implications of addiction are reflected in one of the next issues on ‘Addiction and the Law’. A Greek team around Marselos submitted interesting epidemiological results concerning

cannabis consumption among Greek students. This epidemiological study and the above-mentioned contributions on comorbidity take up central clinical areas, where research and development are needed.

With authors from Southern European countries and Scandinavia the field of those concerned with European addiction is expanding, so that this journal increasingly meets the standards of a journal representing the whole of Europe. The recent listing in 'Current Contents' will increase international attention and, hopefully, bring about a deeper interest and a more active involvement of our colleagues. In this sense, European Addiction Research is truly part of the European network of addiction research.

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