



# TREAT-NMD

## Neuromuscular Network

20<sup>th</sup> March 2008 · Newsletter No. 29



Welcome to the latest newsletter. This edition features the first details about the TREAT-NMD international conference scheduled for November of next year, plus a call for assistance in the creation of the TREAT-NMD Registry of Outcome Measures, and an exciting new resource for Duchenne patients and their carers that is being set up by UPPMD.

Please forward any items that you would like to be included in future editions to [info@treat-nmd.eu](mailto:info@treat-nmd.eu).

Best wishes,

Katie, Volker, Stephen, Emma, Arron and Rachel – the TREAT-NMD coordination team

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### Become a Member of TREAT-NMD

If you are interested in becoming a member of the TREAT-NMD Network please visit our web site to download our membership charter. An application form is also available for download. The web link to our Members' section is: [http://www.treat-nmd.eu/news/item/?members\\_charter](http://www.treat-nmd.eu/news/item/?members_charter)

We look forward to welcoming new members!

#### About this newsletter

This is a fortnightly newsletter sent to all members of TREAT-NMD's "Club of Interest" worldwide. Earlier editions of the newsletter can be found online at [www.treat-nmd.eu/news/newsletter/index.htm](http://www.treat-nmd.eu/news/newsletter/index.htm). If you would like to subscribe directly, please visit our website at [www.treat-nmd.eu/](http://www.treat-nmd.eu/) where you will find a subscription form at the bottom of the homepage. You can also use the same form if you no longer wish to receive this newsletter – just select the unsubscribe button.

#### Working with us

TREAT-NMD aims to be an inclusive rather than an exclusive network, and you do not have to be based in Europe or be a partner to be involved. International collaboration with experts from all over the world is already taking place, and new links are being developed.

If you are involved in any of TREAT-NMD's areas of interest and have something you'd like to say or a suggestion of where we could work together, we encourage you to get in touch by writing to us at [info@treat-nmd.eu](mailto:info@treat-nmd.eu). The coordination team in Newcastle will be happy to put you in touch with the person most relevant to your particular interest.

## TREAT-NMD / NIH International Conference in November 2009

One of TREAT-NMD's major deliverables is to prepare an international conference on the topic of translational research in neuromuscular disease. Arranged jointly with the US NIH, this exciting meeting will be a key event in the field, bringing together leading specialists from all over the world to share progress in the area of translational medicine in inherited neuromuscular diseases and set the future collaborative agenda. A programme committee has now been set up to develop a programme covering the whole range of areas of importance to translational research, from the preclinical environment to clinical tools for trial readiness and case studies on trial experience. The meeting is provisionally scheduled to take place in Brussels in November 2009. Further details will be posted via the newsletter and web site.



## TREAT-NMD Registry of Outcome Measures – information and call for assistance

The Registry of Outcome Measures (ROM) is an online database that provides partners and the wider NMD research community with information about existing Outcome Measures. ROM will be a ready reference that provides important base information about existing outcome measures and clear directions to key points of contact and comprehensive sources of information. To whatever extent is possible for each Outcome Measure, ROM will provide:

- sufficient information to enable investigators to rapidly exclude non-suitable OMs, targeting their search to potentially useful OMs;
- contact information for accessing OMs, equipment, devices, manuals, SOPs, etc; and
- a list of various types of reference materials including key reference, validation references, systematic review references and other miscellaneous references.

Kings College, London is leading on this TREAT-NMD activity and they seek the assistance with the provision of OM information that will be used to populate the ROM database.

The ROM Data Collection Form for 'New Outcome Measures' is available to download from the TREAT-NMD website at <http://www.treat-nmd.eu/rom/> and we would like to encourage individuals with knowledge of a particular OM to complete the form for the Outcome Measures with which they are familiar.

To prevent duplication and wasted effort, prior to commencing the form completion process, please notify Joanne Auld ([Joanne.Auld@iop.kcl.ac.uk](mailto:Joanne.Auld@iop.kcl.ac.uk)) of the name of the Outcome Measures (OM) for which you intend to provide details who will be able to advise you if someone else has already registered to provide details for a specific OM. In addition to preventing duplication, this will provide me with contact details for people who might be able to add to the initial information supplied for a particular OM.

You can complete the form electronically and email it back to [Joanne.Auld@iop.kcl.ac.uk](mailto:Joanne.Auld@iop.kcl.ac.uk) or print it out and fill it in by hand. Printed forms should be returned to:

Joanne Auld, c/o Office of Dr Michael Rose, Room 91.23, 9th Floor, Ruskin Wing, King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London, SE5 9RS

For further information please contact Joanne Auld or visit: <http://www.treat-nmd.eu/rom/>

### Muscular Dystrophy International Research Conference in Milan, 15-16 February

by Francesca Ceradini,

Scientific Director of Parent Project Onlus.



"Duchenne and Becker Muscular Dystrophy, Research and

Clinical Trials" was the title of the 2008 annual research conference of the Italian Parent Project onlus which took place on 15 and 16 February in Milan. More than 250 people attended the meeting and twenty scientists, clinicians and association representatives for muscular dystrophies presented and discussed recent research results, ongoing and planned clinical trials, medical management and international networking.

The first day was focused on the illustration of the TREAT-NMD network, the new Italian Registry for DMD, BMD and SMA (which are scheduled to begin operating in March), and new models to develop regional care services aimed at improving quality of life.

Then, the second day was dedicated to basic and therapeutic research. Scientists gave an insight into the main experimental strategies, namely drug, gene and cell therapies, outlining their goals and limitations and giving updates on any corresponding clinical trials.

In the last decade several adult-derived stem cells have been isolated from bone marrow, blood and skeletal muscles. These cells have been characterized and used in animal transplantation experiments, and the results have opened up new possibilities for cell therapy in muscular dystrophy. Some promising examples were described by Yvan Torrente (bone marrow and blood-derived stem cells), Maurilio Sampaolesi (mesoangioblasts) and David Sassoon (muscle-derived stem cells). All showed that in mdx mice or in GRMD dogs models the different stem cells are able to engraft into the damaged muscles and promote tissue regeneration with a good recovery of the muscle function. Furthermore, Maurilio Sampaolesi and Giulio Cossu announced that a phase I clinical trial based on the use of mesoangioblasts will be launched in Italy before the end of the year, the trial will start with a very preliminary phase which will enroll 3 DMD boys. Beside the advanced results regarding adult stem cells, Rita Perlingeiro from the University of Texas presented a very new study (published in January on Nature Medicine) based on the possibility of using embryonic stem cells as alternative strategy.

In the gene therapy field most attention was given to the exon skipping technique, a promising potential therapy for DMD. Skipping specific exons would restore the reading frame resulting in the production of an internally deleted but essentially functional dystrophin, as observed in the milder Becker muscular dystrophy, thus providing significant functional improvement of DMD. Different approaches were illustrated: Steve Wilton from Australia and Annemieke Aartsma-Rus from Netherlands presented their basic and applied researches, respectively, both achieved with the Antisense OligoNucleotide (AON) strategy; on the other end Olivier Danos from France and Irene Bozzoni from Italy showed examples of exon skipping strategies based on the Adeno-Associated Virus delivery approach. The Italian team is now preparing the approval path for an exon 51 skipping clinical trial.

Finally, the third session of the day was focused on drug therapies. Attempts to replace or to correct the mutated gene might result in a definitive solution for muscular dystrophy but this is not easy to achieve. Alternative approaches that prevent or delay muscle degeneration, reduce inflammation, or promote muscle metabolism or regeneration might all benefit patients and, in the future, synergize with gene or cell therapy. Steroids that reduce inflammation are currently the only therapeutic tool used in the majority of DMD boys, but the heterogeneity of protocols used and results obtained represent a big issue for the community. Douglas Biggar presented his data on the long term (10 year) use of steroids outlining the need for more studies on this direction. A beneficial effect in muscle repair using a NO-releasing derivative flurbiprofen, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug named HCT1026, was reported by Emilio Clementi. Furthermore, different approaches focusing on the promotion of muscle hypertrophy and the reduction of muscle wasting were presented by Pierlorenzo Puri and Jas Seehra. Both studies are based on the inhibition of myostatin: on one hand with the use of histone deacetylases inhibitors (the Italian team), on the other hand mediated by an injectable ligand of the myostatin receptor (called ACE031) developed by Acceleron Pharma. At the end of the meeting, great attention was given to the news regarding PTC124 clinical trials. The use of this orally bioavailable drug, which selectively induces skipping of premature termination codons, showed encouraging results in a phase IIa clinical trial. PTC Therapeutics is now ready to go further, and Langdon Miller announced the startup of a 1 year long phase IIb clinical trial that will involve different centers in US and Europe (including 3 Italian centers) and will start before the end of 2008.

**Photographs (l-r): Michele Sanguine: Dr. Annemieke Aartsma-Rus: Prof. Steve Wilton and the Audience**

### Developing a consensus for the assessment of the *mdx* mouse model for research

TREAT-NMD has been involved in a number of workshops to address the research community's need to standardise the assessment of animal models used in preclinical research, to evaluate the usefulness of the current animal models to obtain relevant physiological readouts of disease, and to reach a consensus on standard operating procedures (SOPs). Experts from TREAT-NMD, along with colleagues across Europe, US and Australia, are developing these SOPs for the *mdx* mouse model for DMD. TREAT-NMD will host the next workshop in June 2008 in Zurich, where it is expected that a consensus document will be finalised and agreed before dissemination to the neuromuscular community. In planning this workshop TREAT-NMD would like to thank Eric Hoffman of the Wellstone MDC (USA) and FED (Foundation to Eradicate Duchenne) for their generous support that is helping this workshop come about.

We hope this truly international workshop will pave the way for a consensus in the use and assessment of the *mdx* mouse model for research into DMD. Its outcomes will be reported in this newsletter later in the summer. For information about TREAT-NMD's work in this area, please contact Raffaella Willmann at [Raffaella.Willmann@unibas.ch](mailto:Raffaella.Willmann@unibas.ch)



### Other news

#### Duchenne Community site launch!

United Parent Projects MD (UPPMD) has taken the initiative to start an online Duchenne community. This community will officially go live tomorrow, 21 March 2008.



duchenne  
community

The community will allow you to make contact with Duchenne families around the world. There will be a whole range of possibilities: keep your own blog, a calendar with events and activities, updated information on research and care. But above all, it will be a place where everyone who is involved in Duchenne muscular dystrophy can share their strength, be stronger together for a better quality of life, and set-up activities together to get more attention and money for Duchenne research.



The website is officially launched tomorrow but you can visit and register today! Of course there is still a lot of information that we can use, so become an active member and make the community a lively place. We hope to have text in different languages so feel free to write in your native language.

Through this online community you can contribute to the empowerment of Duchenne parents all over the world and provide local doctors and caregivers with important information. Thank you for your help.

Visit <http://www.duchenne-community.com> to register!

## Rare Diseases Task Force



The Rare Diseases Task Force is a DG SANCO-funded body that has a key role to play in establishing EU policy towards rare diseases. It is led by Dr Ségolène Aymé, a medical geneticist, director of the Orphanet database of rare diseases and a member of TREAT-NMD's Scientific and Technological Advisory Council, and its members include leaders of existing European research projects, member state experts and representatives of international organisations. Recent topics it has addressed include the public consultation on rare diseases (see the TREAT-NMD response at <http://www.treat-nmd.eu/assets/documents/TREAT-NMD-response-to-Public-Consultation-on-Rare-Diseases.pdf>) and the importance of establishing European Reference Networks or "virtual centres of excellence" in the field of rare diseases. As the only Network of Excellence in the rare disease field, TREAT-NMD is an important voice in the task force. At recent meetings in Luxembourg and Paris, in both of which TREAT-NMD participated, it was evident that task forces such as the RDTF are a valuable way for those involved in the field to influence EU policy for the future. However, it is clear that lobbying at both a national and international level must make a strong, evidence-based case for the added value of collaborative efforts in terms of improving research and patient care across Europe. For further information see <http://www.rdtf.org/>

## Funding calls

### MARIE CURIE INDIVIDUAL FELLOWSHIP CALLS Support for training and career development of researchers



Marie Curie International Outgoing Fellowships (IOF) - Call identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-IOF-2008

Marie Curie International Incoming Fellowships (IIF) - Call identifier: FP7-PEOPLE-IIF-2008

Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowships for Career Development (IEF) - FP7-PEOPLE-IEF-2008

The calls for the above Marie Curie Individual Fellowships have now been published, and the deadline is 19 August 2008 at 17.00 Brussels local time.

You will find all the documents relating to these calls (call fiche, work programme, guide for applicants) on the Cordis website at the following link:

[http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7CallsPage&ID\\_ACTIVITY=12](http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm?fuseaction=UserSite.FP7CallsPage&ID_ACTIVITY=12)

## Clinical Research Fellow

Ref A055R


<http://tinyurl.com/2hbqcb>

Applications are invited for a clinical research fellowship available as soon as possible for and tenable for three years. The post will be based at the Newcastle Muscle Centre which is situated within the Institute of Human Genetics at the International Centre for Life in Newcastle upon Tyne. You will be medically qualified and interested in a career in clinical genetics, neurology or paediatric neurology with a special interest in inherited neuromuscular diseases. Under the guidance of Professors Bushby, Straub and Lochmüller, the applicant will have the opportunity to develop a research project eligible for MD or PhD. Opportunities within the group include basic laboratory studies on inherited neuromuscular diseases, development of new therapeutics and clinical studies on the burden of disease and the generation of new outcome measures for clinical trials. Candidates are strongly recommended to contact the team for further details of all of the exciting opportunities. The post will also offer the opportunity for specialised training in the diagnosis and management of both childhood and adult cases of inherited neuromuscular diseases.

The Newcastle Muscle Centre has a long tradition of excellence in research, diagnosis and management of neuromuscular diseases and is the recipient of a recent 10m Euro grant from the EU to lead a Network of Excellence on translational research in NMD ([www.treat-nmd.eu](http://www.treat-nmd.eu)). Newcastle is also a partner in the new MRC Centre for Neuromuscular Diseases together with University College London. In addition to developing expertise in diagnosis and management of inherited muscle diseases, you will have the opportunity to gain valuable clinical trials experience, a skill which will become increasingly important in the field over the coming years as novel treatments come to trial.

Interested applicants should contact Professor Kate Bushby ([kate.bushby@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:kate.bushby@ncl.ac.uk)), Professor Volker Straub ([volker.straub@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:volker.straub@ncl.ac.uk)) or Professor Hanns Lochmüller ([hanns.lochmuller@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:hanns.lochmuller@ncl.ac.uk)).

**Please also note that the physiotherapist position advertised in newsletter No. 25 should be available on the vacancies section of the Newcastle University website from March 25th.**

## CTCC Workshop

## Clinical Trials in Neuromuscular Diseases

19th-21st June 2008

Programme [http://www.treat-nmd.eu/assets/documents/Workshop-schedule\\_o80303.pdf](http://www.treat-nmd.eu/assets/documents/Workshop-schedule_o80303.pdf)

Flyer and registration form: [http://www.treat-nmd.eu/assets/documents/Flyer\\_o80229.pdf](http://www.treat-nmd.eu/assets/documents/Flyer_o80229.pdf)

For further information or to express an interest please contact: [annette.pohl@uniklinik-freiburg.de](mailto:annette.pohl@uniklinik-freiburg.de)



## Send us your news and views!

We strongly encourage all partners and supporters to send their own news and updates and we will be happy to include them in future editions of the newsletter. Please send your contributions to [emma.heslop@treat-nmd.eu](mailto:emma.heslop@treat-nmd.eu)