

## Alzheimer Europe's European Parliament lunch debate focuses on current and future treatment of Alzheimer's dementia

On 27 June Alzheimer Europe held a successful lunch debate in the European Parliament chaired by MEP Deirdre Clune (Ireland) which focused on the current and future treatment of Alzheimer's dementia.



MEP Deirdre Clune (Ireland)

The lunch debate gathered over 50 people including MEPs Heinz Becker (Austria) Nessa Childers (Ireland) Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland) and Sofia Ribeiro (Portugal) and a representative from MEP Hilde Vautmans (Belgium). The audience included representatives from 19 Alzheimer Europe member associations and several pharmaceutical companies.

The numbers of people with dementia in Europe is increasing and still there is no cure for Alzheimer's disease (AD) or any other common type of dementia.



Helen Rochford Brennan (EWGPWD)

Medicines have been developed for AD that can temporarily alleviate symptoms, or slow down their progression, in some people but these treatments have limited efficacy.

Yet despite an unprecedented research focus on AD and dementia at European and global level, attempts to develop new drugs for treating Alzheimer's disease have so far been unsuccessful.

However our understanding of the underlying disease processes causing Alzheimer's dementia has increased. The four speakers at the lunch debate presented an overview of past present and future treatment and research into treatments for AD.

The first speaker Prof. Alexander Kurz, (Technical University of Munich, Germany) highlighted the current pharmacological treatment and non-pharmacological management options.

Even today, there are a number of evidence-based treatment and management options for Alzheimer's dementia, including pharmacological and non-pharmacological approaches but often, they are underused and poorly coordinated.



*Prof. Simon Lovestone (UK) and Prof. Alexander Kurz (Germany)*

Prof. Kurz said, "Using both a drug based treatment and on top of that cognitive and physical exercise with occupational therapy works at all stages of the disease and combined they can have an additional effect."

The second speaker, Prof. Simon Lovestone, (University of Oxford, United Kingdom) gave an update on researchers' latest understanding of Alzheimer's

disease and Alzheimer's dementia. He was hopeful that a treatment can be found despite the current failure rate of research compared to other diseases. He started by asking what if we have done too little too late?

He emphasised the benefits of working together "I think we can end AD. This is in an achievable aim but we can only achieve this if we work together in Europe and internationally. AD is one of the hardest medical problems we face today"

Prof. Lovestone went on to explain that "there needed to be diversification of drug development, trials in the early phase of disease, biomarkers for secondary prevention and public-private multinational collaborations.

Prof. Bengt Winblad (Karolinska Institutet, Sweden) gave an overview of ongoing clinical trials including preventative strategies. He highlighted that the majority of trials targeted various stages of the so called "amyloid hypothesis" but that increasingly new targets are being researched including preventative and tau related disease modifying treatments. He



*Prof. Bengt Winblad (Sweden)*

concluded that the best approach would probably include a "cocktail" of different treatments.

Dr. Elisabetta Vaudano (Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI)), presented the public private partnership of IMI, their efforts to speed up the drug discovery process and how the European Union and IMI are supporting efforts to identify new treatments for AD.

Dr Elisabetta Vaudano stressed the importance of increased funding made available for AD research and the importance of collaboration at all levels,



Dr Elisabetta Vaudano (IMI)

she said “IMI is a neutral platform where all involved in drug development can engage in open collaboration on shared challenges. It is at the forefront of cutting-edge research, providing a combination of funding, expertise, knowledge, skills and resources to build a collaboration with a creative spirit, innovative and critical thinking.”

Through IMI researchers can gain from each other, new knowledge, skill and ways of working to make a difference in drug development and ultimately to patients’ lives.

The question and answer session was very lively with MEP Sofia Ribeiro kicking off with a question on Brexit and the impact on research, and what would be the effect for the rest of Europe since so much research was taking place within the UK.

Simon Lovestone stated that “Brexit will have a terrible impact on AD research with the risk of loss of funding and of leadership”. He went on to explain that “the UK bats above its weight in dementia research and is in fact a world leader. This is something the UK Government understands, but for it to continue, we need to ensure that participation in EU funded projects continues after Brexit”

Dr. Elisabetta Vaudano said “It is important to keep working closely with the European Medicines Agency (EMA) after its relocation post Brexit and to ensure there is a mechanism in place to keep UK scientists in research.”



MEP Sofia Ribeiro (Portugal)

Nessa Childers tweeted:



MEP Heinz Becker stated he was very impressed with the debate and offered the full support of the European Parliament asking what academia and research needed. "Is it to put pressure on Member States or is it simply a need to increase the research budget?"



*MEP Heinz K. Becker (Austria)*

In reply Prof. Winblad said "We need research at all levels, we already have advances in the quality of care due to research and from a politicians perspective we need to get more of the Eastern European countries involved, good diagnosis and more clinical trials."

Prof. Lovestone also replied that "Science depends very much on freedom of movement. For example roughly two thirds of those working in my laboratory in the UK are EU citizens and the UK needs to keep this wealth of experience. The issue of freedom of movement is one for politicians to solve as well as more funding and pressure to co-ordinate Member States."

States."

Prof. Kurz emphasised the need for more research and that politicians can help it become more efficient. "We also need to make sure no area is neglected. Pharmacology needs to be complemented with a dementia friendly society."



*MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen (Finland)*

Both Prof. Lovestone and Dr Vaudano brought up the topic of data and data collection and regulation saying that this is more critical than ever in this digital age. Getting regulation right will be one of the keys to success to make sure data used is secure and respects the rights of citizens and that its use can be maximised within proper regulation.

MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen thanked AE for an inspiring interactive and a high quality meeting but commented "What if we have got it wrong? How serious is this? Could it be the "the 4th type of diabetes"? Helen Rochford Brennan from the European Working Group of People with Dementia (EWGPWD) also asked are we really looking in the right place? Prof. Simon Lovestone went on to say "together we have an extraordinary opportunity to end AD and have a result" and highlighted that researchers have greatly expanded the targets and mechanisms that are currently being focused on.

AE Executive Director Jean Georges commented, "It is great to hear this message of hope and the new focus on preventing Alzheimer's dementia.



*Jean Georges (Executive Director, AE)*

What are the perspectives for people already at the dementia stage or those with other forms of dementia?"

Prof. Kurz said "We need hope for a novel treatment to slow down or modify the pathology of AD but we do also need to look at other dementias such as frontotemporal dementia and Lewy body dementia. The importance of behavioural interventions will increase with early diagnosis and disease-modifying treatments becoming available, prolonging time spent in mild and moderate disease stages. They represent key contributions to much needed empowerment and self-management of people with dementia."

MEP Deirdre Clune summed up and thanked all the speakers and said that she felt inspired and that with the collaboration at European level she had more hope for a new treatment and eventually a cure for AD.

Prof. Iva Holmerová Chair of Alzheimer Europe closed the lunch debate with the launch of AE's new publication, the "European Dementia Monitor 2017" which highlights the existing inequalities in access to dementia care and treatment across Europe. The objective of the report is to provide a benchmark of national dementia policies in order to compare and rate the responses of European countries to the dementia challenge.

Prof. Holmerová said she was sorry to see that there is still a clear East/West divide in Europe. "It is time therefore that all European countries and in particular those in Eastern Europe recognise dementia as a national priority and develop national dementia strategies."



*Iva Holmerová (Chair, AE)*

The next European Parliament lunch debate will be held on 5 December 2017.