
Volume 15 - Issue 2, 2015 - Management Matrix

European Heart Agency



The European Heart Agency was opened two years ago as the Brussels office of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and is located in the centre of the city close to the European Commission. It has three branches: European Affairs, the European Heart Health Institute and the European Heart Academy.

ESC Immediate Past President Professor Panos Vardas, Managing Chair of the European Heart Agency, says: "By establishing the European Heart Agency the ESC now has a position near the heart of European politics. We will use this vantage point to promote policies and actions to prevent cardiovascular disease and encourage equal access to treatments."

European Heart Academy

The mission of the European Heart Academy is to champion academic excellence by fostering future leaders in cardiovascular medicine. It does this by organising courses around relevant cardiovascular topics together with an excellent European university. Each course leads to a university degree.

The Master of Sciences (MSc) in Health Economics, Outcomes and Management in Cardiovascular Sciences launches in October 2015 for a maximum of 30 students. The European Heart Academy has teamed up with the London School of Economics to teach students a unique skill set combining world-class expertise in health economics and in cardiovascular disease management.

Professor Paulus Kirchhof, Head of the University Courses Unit at the European Heart Academy, says: "Leading economic and cardiovascular disease experts teamed up to design this course which is the first of its kind. There are many health economics courses but none have a cardiovascular focus."

Economic evaluation has become a central part of leading departments and hospitals, and the course was created in response to this development. "These skills are not covered by current medical school curricula and are usually not taught in a formal way during specialisation, but they increasingly shape the way that we practise medicine," says Kirchhof. "This is especially the case in cardiovascular medicine where we have sophisticated interventions that prolong life but have high demands on technology, skills and expertise, and are therefore costly."

He adds: "The overall mission of the ESC is to reduce the burden of cardiovascular diseases in Europe. The ESC recognises that this has to be achieved in an environment where resources are limited. We think that the people who come out of this course will have the best training and education to make informed decisions about how to deliver optimal healthcare."

The programme is expected to attract two types of students. A large number are likely to be cardiologists, who are on the road to becoming department leaders or hospital leaders in the future.

Health economists who want to specialise in cardiovascular health economics are also potential applicants. Kirchhof says: "Students will come out of the course not only with a first-rate understanding of health economics but also with a profound insight into best practice in cardiovascular medicine."

To help students participate in the course, the ESC will offer a limited number of scholarships. ESC members who apply for the course and are offered a place can apply for one of the scholarships, which will fund the full course fees. Scholars will pay travel and accommodation costs for on-site activities.



ESC Brussels Office

The European Heart Academy is less than two years old but is set to release its first graduates this October. Some 50 cardiologists with a special interest in heart failure have nearly completed the Postgraduate Course in Heart Failure. The programme was designed by the Heart Failure Association (HFA) of the ESC in collaboration with Zurich University and the Zurich Heart House in Switzerland and leads to a Certificate of Advanced Studies.

Two more courses are on the way. The Advanced Course in Cardiac Arrhythmias focuses on another subspecialty of cardiology and is designed for 30 students. Set to start in 2016, it aims to educate the future leaders in electrophysiology. The course was designed by the European Heart Rhythm Association (EHRA) of the ESC in partnership with Maastricht University in the Netherlands and leads to a Diploma of Advanced Studies.

Also planned for 2016 is the MSc in Translational Cardiovascular Medicine which was planned together with the German Centre for Cardiovascular Research (DZHK) and the University of Hamburg in Germany. The programme is aimed at cardiovascular clinicians and researchers and expects to enrol 20 students.

All the courses intend to train future leaders in cardiovascular medicine and the themes therefore reflect upcoming hot topics in the field. Heart failure is a growing problem in Europe due to an ageing population, improved survival from cardiovascular diseases and increasing risk factors including obesity and diabetes. It is a costly disease largely because of hospitalisations.

Leaders are needed in the area of arrhythmias since atrial fibrillation and sudden death are two of the big unsolved cardiovascular health problems in Europe.

"The courses on heart failure and arrhythmias will give participants world-class training in important areas of cardiovascular medicine where novel therapeutic options are entering clinical medicine," says Kirchhof. "The management of patients in both subspecialties is changing with the emergence of electronic diagnostic tools, telemedicine and hybrid therapies that combine drugs and interventions."

Leaders at the ESC and the European Heart Academy firmly believe that some of the solutions to current chronic cardiovascular diseases will be found in developing novel personalised or stratified therapies. Kirchhof says: "We expect that this development needs a new generation of clinician scientists who have an understanding of clinical cardiology and of modern approaches to the biosciences and to research. We hope that the MSc course will train future leaders in translational cardiovascular medicine."

All the courses are executive style and allow students to continue work while they study. A few weeks each year are dedicated to on-site training. Good use is made of online teaching, self-learning assignments, and online evaluation.

An alumni forum has been established for students and graduates of the European Heart Academy to encourage networking among the future leaders in cardiovascular disease. The group will operate through an online forum and yearly meetings at ESC Congress, starting this year in London, UK, at the end of August.

Kirchhof says: "We have come a long way in the last 18 months, but we still have to fully establish the European Heart Academy as a fully recognised place to train cardiovascular leaders of the future. Ultimately we will demonstrate this when graduates become leaders in their respective subspecialties."

European Heart Health Institute

The European Heart Health Institute is in charge of new ESC activities including clinical trials, personalised medicine, novel technologies, quality assessment, health economics and healthcare management.

It is compiling the ESC Atlas of Cardiology, a unique database on healthcare systems, provision and services in cardiovascular medicine in the 56 ESC member countries. "The Atlas is an ongoing project but the plan is to map in a credible way the costs of cardiovascular diseases in different parts of Europe," says Vardas, who is Acting Chair of the European Heart Health Institute. "It will also describe the differences in cardiovascular disease burden and inequalities in availability of treatments."

Vardas adds: "The European Heart Health Institute is set to become a reliable source of information on the costs of cardiovascular diseases and the cost-effectiveness of diagnostic tests and treatments in Europe."

European Affairs

The European Affairs division works with European Union (EU) and national policymakers, European advocacy groups and medical associations to promote policies that favour cardiovascular health. It provides the secretariat for the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Heart group which hosts awareness raising activities in Brussels such as Cardiovascular Health Week. The division also provides the secretariat for the European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA). Another activity is CardioScape, a project which conducted a survey of the European cardiovascular research landscape using funding from the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7)

Key Points

- the European Heart Agency is the Brussels bureau of the European Society of Cardiology.
- the three branches of the European Heart Agency are European Affairs, the European Heart Health Institute and the European Heart Academy.
- the European Heart Academy is training future leaders in cardiovascular medicine.
- the European Heart Health Institute aims to provide reliable information on the cost-effectiveness of cardiovascular treatments in Europe.
- European Affairs works with EU and national policymakers, European advocacy groups and medical associations to promote policies that favour cardiovascular health.

Published on : Mon, 11 May 2015