International collaboration for research in prevention of stroke and dementia launched

An international consortium of mostly European investigators has launched a major collaborative research program to uncover mechanisms and pathways in different forms of small vessel disease.

Stroke and dementia rank among the most pressing health issues in Europe. Cerebral small vessel diseases (SVDs) have emerged as a central link between these two major co-morbidities. SVDs account for more than 30% of strokes and at least 40% of dementia cases. They encounter multiple distinct diseases that can be separated based on their underlying genetic defects, risk factors, and clinical presentations. Despite this profound impact on human health, there are no treatments with proven efficacy against SVDs.

The new network “Small vessel diseases in a mechanistic perspective: Targets for Intervention in Stroke and Dementia (SVDs@target)” is funded through the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme and brings together top scientists with a wide range of complementary expertise. The academic institutions involved are the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitaet (LMU, Munich, coordinating site), the University of Oxford and University of Edinburgh (UK), the University of Copenhagen (Denmark), INSERM (France), the University of Utrecht and University of Maastricht (The Netherlands), the University of Muenster and Technische Universitaet Muenchen (Germany), and the University of Vermont (US). The network further partners with the patient organisation Stroke Alliance for Europe (SAFE, Belgium), and with GABO:mi, a German company for project management.

SVDs@target partners have already made major progress in identifying key mechanisms underlying multiple SVDs. The new network involves basic scientists and academic clinicians and will make use of novel animal models and expertly phenotyped patient cohorts to identify key mechanisms common to multiple SVDs and determine how these mechanisms contribute to individual SVDs.

A major objective of the 5-year project is to identify common molecular, cellular, and physiological mechanisms that compromise the function of microvessels in different SVDs. The project will further determine how these common mechanistic defects cause brain damage and explore novel therapeutic approaches in experimental systems and in patients. The project will use state-of-the art technologies to enable the development of novel treatments and contribute to the prevention of stroke and dementia.

“This project comes at the right point in time. We are very excited about the opportunity and synergies that can be expected from this collaboration” says Martin Dichgans from LMU.
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