

April 6, 2007

Ethics of European-Chinese biomedical research collaborations

This week in Beijing, a new European and Chinese Expert Group on ethics of research in biomedicine and biotechnology has been set up. The international committee, composed of 10 members from the fields of medicine, ethics, law, political science and social science will work towards a guidelines for best practice in ethical governance of collaborative research between China and Europe, foster mutual understanding and provide opportunities to learn from each other. Results are to be expected within less than 3 years.

The new Ethical Expert Group is part of BIONET, a Coordinated Action Project, funded by the European Union research framework program 6. BIONET is a 21-partner European-Chinese collaboration on ethical governance in the life sciences, coordinated by the London School of Economics and involving leading Chinese institutions such as Hunan Institute of Reproduction and Stem Cell Engineering (Changsha), Peking University Health Science Centre, Union Medical College (Beijing) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing).

Two cultures working together to tackle some of the most sensitive issues in biomedical research ethics, such as the latest developments in reproductive medicine, genomics, biobanking, and stem cell research. It shall provide an opportunity for mutual learning. The group works on the assumption that an exchange process can provide better solutions for both sides. A series of conferences and workshops to be held in Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha and other places in China and Europe are planned, the first of which was hosted by Peking University Health Care Centre in the week of 1-6 April. It's special focus were questions of informed consent and ethical review boards in assisted reproductive technologies and biomedical research. The workshop was attended by 20 experts from Europe and about 27 clinical practitioners and bioethicists from China. Exchange was substantial and fruitful as participants at the final session said.

The Expert Group is chaired by Christoph Rehmann-Sutter, a Professor of bioethics at the University of Basel/Switzerland and also President of the Swiss National Advisory Commission on Biomedical Ethics. Trained both in molecular biology and in philosophy he is a specialist for communication in bioethics and biopolitics. The Expert Group is co-chaired by Professor Qiu Renzong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and includes Professor Lu Guangxiu, Professor Zhai Xiaomei and Professor Cong Yali from China and Professor Herbert Gottweis, Professor Wolfgang Hennig, Professor Geneva Richardson and Dr. Ole Döring from Europe.

“Communication, based on listening to the concerns of others in different cultural contexts, is a root from which ethics can grow. It is itself an ethical act,” said Prof. Rehmann-Sutter.

“Though bioethics emerged a little late in China, in recent years our government has made great efforts to develop bioethics working with scholars in related fields. Now with the

support of the government and efforts of scholars, we have seen how bioethics has really provided guidance in biomedical research and practice. I believe BIONET will improve mutual communication and help to standardise practice so that we can protect the interests of common people,” said Professor Lu Guangxiu.

Interviews can be requested and information is available through the secretariat of the Expert Group at BIOS centre, London School of Economics in Europe and through Prof. Cong Yali, Peking University Health Science Centre in China.

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Appendixes

List of members of Expert Group:

- Professor Lu Guangxiu, Institute of Human Reproduction and Stem Cell Engineering, Changsha
- Professor Professor Qiu Renzong, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (co-Chair)
- Professor Cong Yali, Peking University Health Science Centre
- Professor Zhai Xiaomei, Peking Union Medical College, Research Centre for Bioethics, Beijing
- Dr. Ole Döring, Institute of Asian Affairs, Hamburg, Germany
- Professor Herbert Gottweis, Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Austria
- Professor Wolfgang Hennig, Institute of Genetics, University of Mainz, Germany & CAS-MPG Partner Institute for Computational Biology, Shanghai, China
- Professor Genevra Richardson, School of Law, King's College, United Kingdom

Chairman: Professor Christoph Rehmann-Sutter, Unit for Ethics of the Biosciences, University of Basel, Switzerland

Short description of BIONET

BIONET is a network of European and Chinese researchers which will work to undertake research, training, workshops and conferences, together with the production of relevant materials and documentation, on the ethical governance of research in the life sciences and biomedicine within and between China and European countries. The project will run from October 2006 to September 2009. Website: www.bionet-china.org