

Editor's Page

Medical Research in Greece

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Unlike any other scientific or professional area in our country, medical research is of the highest quality. Greek researchers have a very pronounced presence at international medical conferences, with significant presentations and abstracts. Additionally, year by year, more and more scientific studies from Greece are being published in prestigious international journals. According to official sources, Greece is among the top 30 countries in the world as regards the number of publications, most of them coming from biomedical research. This fact can easily be confirmed by searching the international scientific databases.

Important studies are being conducted that span the entire spectrum of medical science, in both clinical and laboratory settings. Since the most common medical problems are associated with cardiovascular disease and cancer, it seems that research interest is focused mainly on those conditions.

Approximately 80% of the research is being performed by the Greek Universities, and particularly the Medical School of the University of Athens. However, there are other institutions, including the National Research Foundation, the Foundation for Biomedical Research of the Academy of Athens, the Pasteur Institute, the "Alexander Fleming" Biomedical Sciences Research Centre and others, that possess high level researchers and actively contribute to the promotion of medical research in Greece.

Why then does Greece lag behind according to European or international standards? It is possible that Greece lacks serious basic research efforts, related mainly to molecular biology and genetics, compared to other European countries. This is not because we lack excellent researchers, but because basic research requires a costly technological infrastructure.

On the other hand, Greek universities and research centres must be well organised in order to participate dynamically in European Community Programmes and to be able to absorb European research funds to the highest degree possible.

Moreover, to attain an even higher level of research performance, it is necessary, apart from research funding, to focus on meritocracy, which means a careful selection of the most appropriate researchers, based on objective abilities and qualifications, who will utilise to the fullest extent all the possible means available.

Unfortunately, today we are living under difficult economic conditions, having to deal with new problems and situations. Even so, medical research should not be regarded as an unnecessary luxury. There is a relationship between medical research and the economic crisis, bidirectional but not in the same manner. The economic crisis negatively affects medical research by reducing direct and indirect funding, whereas medical research can have very positive effects, even in our economy.

It is very well known that there are not many possible ways of coming out of an economic crisis. The most critical are growth of investments and productivity. One of the most important requirements for the growth of productivity is innovation and research, which in our country find their best expression in the medical sciences.

Of course, under any circumstances, the patient must come first, and the immediate and accurate diagnosis and treatment of the disease must be our first priority. But how high would the level of clinical medicine be in the absence of research? Research and clinical medicine are inevitably linked. If research had not led to the discovery of new methods of diagnosis

and new treatments, how would clinical practice be conducted? What would clinical medicine be without antibiotics, if Fleming had considered research as just a luxury, rather than a means of expanding his knowledge and illuminating his mind?

Therefore, even under these difficult economic conditions, it is our obligation to set new standards for medical research that will be effectively promoted and aimed at higher performance. Our objectives should be:

1. Continuous improvement in education and post-graduate training,
2. Promotion and highlighting of research efforts,
3. Encouragement of innovative ideas, and

4. Support of young investigators by all possible means.

Greece's economy has never relied on physical resources, mineral wealth or industrial development. Nevertheless, there are many gifted Greek researchers who have made remarkable achievements in famous centres abroad. Others stay in our poor country and, struggling with inadequate facilities, manage to produce internationally distinguished scientific work. In addition, many more young future investigators, still students in our universities, are making great efforts to broaden their knowledge.

Education and research are the safest way to overcome the economic crisis.