

Medical Microbiology Now an Independent Section

European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS)

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In two previous articles (ESCMID News 2007; issue 2:14-17 and issue 3: 10-12) it has been explained how the specialty of Medical Microbiology has been represented by a commission or subsection of the UEMS Section of Medical Biopathology for decades. Medical Biopathology is an umbrella for a number of laboratory-oriented medical specialties. The informal organization of Medical Microbiology under this umbrella is no longer acceptable in modern Europe, in which the large majority of countries recognize Medical Microbiology as a full specialty with a prominent place in medical care and the prevention of infectious diseases.

Although the criterion for creating a new Section of at least one third of UEMS member states recognizing the full specialty was more than met (20 of 27 UEMS members recognize Medical Microbiology), this act was hampered by reluctance of the Section of Medical Biopathology to allow a split off. This can be well understood because of the various ways one may look in Europe at the position of Medical Microbiology in the practice of laboratory medicine. Members of the so-called polyvalent commission of the Section of Medical Biopathology argued that in their specific national situation, a split off would weaken the profession and would make the practice of laboratory medicine less efficient from a logistic and financial point of view.

As became clear during long discussions in the meetings of the Section of Medical Biopathology the arguments against a split off were not insignificant but a majority of country delegates in the commission of Medical Microbiology still endorsed the creation of an independent Section. At the UEMS Council meeting in Bratislava in October 2007, it was decided to let the country delegates from the national medical associations vote at the next spring meeting in Brussels in 2008. A condition was made that the Section of Medical Biopathology and the members of the commission of Medical Microbiology should seek a way for future cooperation. Even if the split off would be a fact, a solution should be found for a position of medical microbiologists in countries which do not fully recognize the specialty. For a more detailed description of previous events, please see the above-mentioned ESCMID News articles.

Presently, the new Section of Medical Microbiology finds itself in an interim situation. The Secretary General of the UEMS, Dr. Bernard Maillet, has sent a request to the medical associations in the UEMS member states to nominate delegates to the Section, two from each country. The next meeting will take place in Brussels on 27 September on the premises of UEMS. Apart from voting for the board members of the Section a follow up shall be given to the important discussion on the harmonisation of modern training programmes for our specialty in the EU.

The Section of Medical Biopathology has decided to maintain a "Division" of Medical Microbiology. The renaming of com-

missions has been proposed by the UEMS Council. The Division of Medical Microbiology seeks to cover the professional interests of polyvalently trained medical microbiologists and other specialists in our field in countries where Medical Microbiology is not or not fully recognized. It will be important to keep close contact with delegates in this Division, informing them about training programmes and providing information on the performance of specialist practice. Even if, by directive, free movement of medical specialists in the EU member countries was possible, specialties in Europe would be multi-faceted for many years to come. Mutual understanding shall be of utmost importance to be able to cooperate and to strengthen the specialty of Medical Microbiology, regardless of different national backgrounds or training programmes.

Recent and future highlights in the process of becoming an Independent Section

- 11–13 October 2007, UEMS Council meeting, Bratislava: Commission of Microbiology makes plea for an independent Section. Decision made to let the country delegates from the national medical associations decide by a majority vote at the next spring meeting in Brussels in 2008
- 19 April 2008, UEMS Council Meeting, Brussels: vote for an independent Section with 22 votes in favour, 2 against and 4 abstentions. Section is to be named "Section of Medical Microbiology".
- 21 April 2008, during 18th ECCMID, Barcelona: discussion among the Medical Microbiology commission delegates about the next steps to be taken
- 17 May 2008, Section of Medical Biopathology meeting, Bern: decision made to maintain a "Division" of Medical Microbiology within the Section of Medical Biopathology
- 27 September 2008, Section of Medical Microbiology meeting, UEMS premises, Brussels: vote to be held to elect the board members of the Section of Medical Microbiology and a follow up discussion planned on the harmonization of modern training programmes for the specialty in the EU