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MEETING ABSTRACT

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LifeTrain: towards a European framework for continuing professional development in biomedical sciences

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Background: The medicines research and development process has recently undergone considerable change and will continue to change: biomedical professionals are now expected to be much more agile than previously, moving and collaborating between disciplines, sectors and geographical locations. This necessitates that they continually develop and maintain the required competencies to work most effectively. By its multi-disciplinary nature, the discipline of pharmacology is crucial and can serve as a role model in the whole value chain of medicines research and development. The Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) is Europe's largest public-private partnership which aims at improving the research environment in all sciences involved in medicines research (www.imi.europa.eu). The IMI Education and Training projects have developed LifeTrain, an emerging pan-European framework for continuing professional development (CPD) in the biomedical sciences [1].

Methods: LifeTrain's approach (www.lifetrain.eu) focuses on working collaboratively to develop competency profiles for the different roles required in medicines research and development. It was developed with four major stakeholder groups: professional/scientific bodies, course providers, employers and individual professionals. The LifeTrain agreed principles also promote the IMI quality standards for continuing professional development [2]. LifeTrain is supported by the on-course® resource, a comprehensive pan-European course catalogue that serves course seekers to navigate the 'jungle' of post-graduate education and training opportunities offered in Europe (www.on-course.eu) [3]. LifeTrain is coordinated by the EMTRAIN project (www.emtrain.eu), on behalf of all the IMI-funded Education and Training projects.

Results: The LifeTrain framework is comprised of four sets of agreed principles; one for each of the four stakeholder groups, and has a growing list of signatories who have agreed to the principles of the framework and to work towards their implementation. Responsibility for learning lies with the individual professional, but is supported by employers, professional/scientific bodies and course providers working together to provide an appropriate environment for learning. Within the LifeTrain framework, several stakeholder groups, including the IMI projects Eu2P (www.eu2p.eu), PharmaTrain (www.pharmatrain.eu) and SafeSciMET (www.safescimet.eu) as well as professional bodies like EPHAR (www.ephar.org) are currently developing certification processes to recognise that bearers excel in standards of education, skills, experience and professional standing in their respective disciplines

[4]. Inspired by the LifeTrain principles, EPHAR has recently launched their new European Certified Pharmacologist (EuCP) scheme (www.ephar.org/eucp) [5].

Discussion: With an increasing number of IMI LifeTrain signatories the current approaches to CPD in the biomedical sciences will dramatically change. Individual professionals will be guided by clearly defined competency profiles. They will develop and maintain their personal competency portfolios recognised by both professional/scientific bodies and employers. This stimulates mutual recognition of competencies to facilitate mobility: across disciplines; between academia, industry and regulatory authorities; and across geographical boundaries.

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