



Deliverable 2.5: Short-term staff exchanges of senior scientists update

Author(s):	Lead author: : Julie Earl (SERMAS) Co-authors Alfredo Carrato (SERMAS), María Laura Garcia Bermejo (SERMAS), Alena Gabelova (BMC SAV), Bozena Smolkova (BMC SAV), Tatiana Siposova (BMC SAV), Yvonne Kohl (FhG), Agapi Katakaki (NKUA), Maria Dusinska (NILU)
Workpackage:	WP2
Task:	2.1
Version:	3.0
Date:	30. 6. 2023



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Basic information

Project title	Strategies to strengthen scientific excellence and innovation capacity for early diagnosis of gastrointestinal cancers
Project acronym	VISION
Call	H2020-WIDESPREAD-2018-2020
Topic	WIDESPREAD-03-2018
Project type	Coordination and Supporting Action (CSA)
Grant Agreement No.	857381
Nature	R (Document, report - excluding the periodic and final reports)
Dissemination level	PU (Public, fully open, e.g. web)



Executive summary

The goal of short-term personnel exchanges of senior scientists (principal investigators) from the VISION consortium of up to 5 days was to support and strengthen cooperation in GI cancer involving innovative nano-based technologies. Visits to partner laboratories and their facilities stimulate brainstorming discussions, create space for progressive ideas to bridge the gaps in translational oncology research and contribute to identifying new promising research strategies and areas for further joint project applications and publications.

1 Description of work & main achievements

Senior scientists, partners of the VISION project, regularly discussed future collaboration and shared ideas to identify new research strategies and emerging topics to plan follow-up projects. There have been regular discussions regarding short-term staff exchanges among the consortium, and tentative plans for visits with different researchers were made. For example, SERMAS has extended an invitation to Agapi Kataki (NKUA) and Silvia Pastorekova (director of BMC SAV) for a short-term visit to their research facilities. In order to avoid stopping the implementation of the initially planned activities of the VISION projects due to the coronavirus pandemic, only several short-term personnel exchanges took place and many visits were replaced by online ad hoc working meetings. Additionally, partners' regular brainstorming discussions were organized during the project *via* teleconferences and at annual meetings. After the coronavirus crisis, the VISION consortium agreed to continue to use the online form (teleconferences) as the primary instrument for senior scientists for communication. The VISION project was extended for extra nine months without additional funding. As one of the VISION aims is to accelerate the personal and professional development of early-stage researchers and medical doctors, the consortium agreed to prioritize academic stays of Ph.D. students over short-term staff exchanges of senior scientists. Adopting innovative technologies and up-to-date knowledge and know-how in oncology research will contribute to enhancing the reputation, credibility, attractiveness, and networking activities of BMC SAV at both international and national levels.

1.1 Summary of the visits performed

- Maria Dusinska visited BMC SAV in April 2023 during her two months stay in the DANUBIA NanoTECH in Bratislava. She discussed the utilization of existing data in human biomonitoring from previous projects, publications, and future collaboration with Dr. Bozena Smolkova.
- Dr. Efthymios Koniaris from NKUA visited SERMAS/IRYCIS from June 26th until June 30th 2023. Dr. Efthymios Koniaris is a specialist Pathologist in the Pathology Department of the General Hospital of Athens "Hippocratio". Dr. Koniaris spent five days at SERMAS/IRYCIS, two days in the Pathology department to discuss with the experts the abilities of digital pathology, one in the Liquid biopsy facility core, and two in the small animal unit discussing the possibility of transfer part of these technologies in NKUA.

VISION partners used all opportunities to discuss the possibilities of further cooperation and open project challenges, including informal meetings during various scientific events where they met:



- Julie Earl and Bozena Smolkova met in Heidelberg (April 13 - 14, 2022) during the COST CA21116 meeting.
- Agapi Kataki, Alena Gabelova, and Bozena Smolkova met during CUCAP 2023 Conference in Prague (May 28 - 30, 2023), where they discussed the preparation of the ERA-net Transcan-3 proposal and the revised common consortium manuscript.
- All VISION partners met in Slovakia at the Joint International Scientific Conference and International Network of Young Scientists Conference VISION (JISC&INYSC) in Smolenice castle (April 24 – 27, 2023). They discussed possibilities for preparing joint project proposals and further collaborations.

As a result of the close cooperation of the consortium, partners prepared and submitted several joint research proposals (in more detail in deliverable D2.3), and publications (in more detail in deliverable D2.2).

2 Deviation from the workplan

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, only several senior scientists' staff exchanges could be realized because of travel restrictions. When the traveling restrictions were eliminated a priority was given to the new generation of scientists that represent Europe's research future and their formation was downgraded due to the world health crisis. Thus many face-to-face visits were replaced with *ad hoc* online communications (teleconferences). Such deviation from the initial workplan, however, did not affect the implementation of the goals of the VISION projects - strengthening scientific excellence, networking, and building close collaborations resulting in the preparation of joint research projects, publications, and various scientific events.

3 Conclusion

The COVID crisis only shortly paralyzed the progress in implementing this task. Thanks to the partners' flexibility and their shared interest in finding solutions to improving GI cancer patients' outcomes, especially pancreatic cancer patients, the consortium's exchange of knowledge and know-how continued mostly *via ad hoc* online meetings and email communications. As a result, several joint EU-funded projects and publications were submitted – the basis of long-lasting collaboration and networking. The evidence of the enhanced reputation, credibility, and attractiveness of BMC SAV at the international level is the invitation of BMC SAV to act as an associated partner (the hosting/training organization) in two HORIZON-MSCA-2021-COFUND projects.