CVON: an original Netherlands CardioVascular Research Initiative

E. E. van der Wall

Published online: 4 October 2012
© Springer Media / Bohn Stafleu van Loghum 2012

In January 2009 the Netherlands Heart Foundation set up a CardioVascular Profiling Committee. This committee had the honourable task to advise the Netherlands Heart Foundation on the requirements to raise cardiovascular research in the Netherlands to a competitive position in the European front line. It is well known that cardiovascular research in the Netherlands has an excellent reputation worldwide. The assignment of the CardioVascular Profiling Committee was to explore how this position can be improved.

In March 2010, the CardioVascular Profiling Committee issued a report entitled: *'The future of cardiovascular research in the Netherlands: steering towards synergy and impact'*.

The view of the CardioVascular Profiling Committee was that cardiovascular research in the Netherlands, being a relatively small country, should be performed in cooperation. It is therefore essential to combine forces between research groups in order to raise the level of research and to strengthen the international position of the Netherlands

The recommendations of the CardioVascular Profiling Committee were the following: 1) to commit to financing larger, multicentre, related themes; 2) to create a national research program: *'Heart and Blood Vessels and Their Disorders'*; 3) to improve the infrastructure; 4) to improve the training and career prospects of young researchers; and 5) to organise cardiovascular scientific research in a dynamic model with central management and decentralised workplaces.

As a result, the financing of research changed from a bottom-up approach, which has been common practice for years supported by the Netherlands Heart Foundation, to a top-down approach. The Netherlands Heart Foundation realised that it could not implement the recommendations on its own and searched for relevant partners. The following organisations agreed to participate: the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centers (NFU), the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO/ZonMw) indicating that all relevant parties in the Netherlands are involved. These four parties together form a steering group and set up a dedicated committee in 2010 entitled: the Netherlands CardioVascular Research Committee (CVON, www.cvon.eu). Members of this Committee are experts who are still active in their field, and they have ensured that the Dutch cardiovascular research field will take action.

For the first time a call for nationwide proposals went out in the spring of 2011. Consequently, large, nationwide consortia have been formed, and these consortia have formulated their integrated research plans. Over 25 proposals were initially received and after careful scrutiny brought back by the CVON Committee to 16 proposals. The proposals have been cautiously reviewed by a dedicated International Scientific Advisory Council (ISAC) which decided in December 2011 to honour three proposals for 5 million Euro each. The following three large programs have been granted: a program on regenerative medicine (HUSTCARE), a program searching for new biomarkers and therapeutic targets for atherosclerosis (GENIUS), and finally a program on the development of drugs for heart failure (ARENA).

Likewise, in 2012, the same policy has been followed and a total of 11 proposals have been received to be reviewed at the end of this year by the same International Scientific Advisory Council (ISAC) serving in 2011. A main

E. E. van der Wall (✉)
Interuniversity Cardiology Institute of the Netherlands (ICIN)—
Netherlands Heart Institute (NHI),
Utrecht, the Netherlands
e-mail: e.e.van_der_wall@lumc.nl

E. E. van der Wall
e-mail: ernst.van.der.wall@icin.knaw.nl

advantage of the new approach is that it brings researchers in the same field together potentially leading to performing research at a higher level. It also leads to a better focus and improved reorientation. A potential drawback is the lack of support for bottom-up research that might be both original and innovative. To that purpose, an adequate solution has to be found to stimulate young individual researchers.

To summarize, the Netherlands CardioVascular Research Initiative, embodied by CVON, has given a great and original stimulus to cardiovascular research in the Netherlands.

Acknowledgements The information provided by Dr. A. Klaassen (CVON) is gratefully acknowledged.