Message from the Editor

The implementation of the BCNet catalogue provides the opportunity for members to showcase the biological samples stored in their respective biobanks and to inform the wider research community of the potential resources available for collaborative studies. This is the first step towards fulfilling the goal of the network, which is to conduct and promote research collaboration between members, partners, and the international community. Congratulations to BCI, Ghana; MRC, The Gambia; Makarere University, Uganda; UGM, Indonesia; and WRC, Poland for participating in the pilot phase. We are looking forward to more biobanks joining the catalogue.

The catalogue as a research platform will provide visibility to the institutions and their potential to participate in research, thus addressing the under-representation of samples and data available for genetic and molecular studies in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

A transparent governance structure is required for the implementation of the catalogue, to ensure a fair and transparent procedure to promote resource sharing for collaborative studies. In this regard, a governance document and draft guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the sample/data providers and recipients and the access procedures to govern transfer are under development. Each institution will be required to review the guidelines and adapt them to its local setting.

This edition of BCNetter is being published to coincide with the IARC@50 conference (Lyon, 7-10 June). It provides progress on the implementation of the catalogue programme and updates from network members and partners.

Dr Maimuna Mendy
BCNet Coordinator
MendyM@iarc.fr

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In February 2014, BCNet members agreed to introduce a common catalogue to document available resources from their biobanks, to provide visibility for the valuable resources, and to make them available for research projects.

**Implementation of the BCNet Catalogue**

IARC, in collaboration with Karolinska Institutet, Sweden, started to design a global catalogue for BCNet in mid-2014. IARC set up the host server in mid-2015 and the platform was migrated from Sweden. The BCNet training conducted in November 2015 at IARC provided the opportunity to present a public release of the catalogue, to introduce the implementation workflow (Figure 1), and to invite BCNet members to participate in the pilot phase. Nine members registered their biobanks during the first quarter of 2016. The biobanks selected, prepared and submitted subsets of sample data. They also provided general information on their biobanks, research activities and platforms. Four additional institutions have registered information on their biobanks in the catalogue and have yet to submit data.

The process involved the checking, processing and importing of data into the catalogue, with support from IARC data management. The second semester of 2016 was devoted to the consolidation of data submitted in the pilot phase and the development of the catalogue governance structure.

**What were the main challenges?**

One of the motivations of the BCNet catalogue is to collect and gather sample data from BCNet members’ biobanks to promote collaboration between members and with the international community. However, in establishing the catalogue, conceptual and technical challenges had to be dealt with. They include understanding the concept of combining information from different biobanks into a global searchable catalogue with the possibility of providing access and sharing of resources for research collaboration. The technical challenges arise from the necessity to combine data sets of diverse formats from multiple biobanks into a common platform in a standardized and harmonized manner.

The database was designed on the backbone of MIABIS (Minimum Information About Biobank data Sharing)¹ to ensure the highest compatibility of the catalogue with tier sample management systems. Operating a catalogue requires a robust governance structure, which is being developed to guide the process of access, sharing, and collaboration. Under this governance structure, biobanks will have autonomy over their respective data, and requests for collaboration will be sent directly to the institutions and the named principal investigators. Each institution will deal with access requests according to local regulations and conditions.

The pilot phase of implementing the BCNet catalogue has been both challenging and educational. Dealing with issues such as sample data preparation and data integration requires comprehensive management and documentation to provide data of the required quality and can be time-consuming.

**What are the next steps?**

Now that the pilot phase has been successfully implemented with the inclusion of nine biobanks (Figure 2), the next steps are:

1. Expanding the programme by inviting biobanks to register their information and participate in the catalogue, followed by populating the catalogue with new or additional data from sample collections
2. Promoting the catalogue by increasing awareness, and informing BCNet members of its benefit in building partnerships within and outside the network and
3. Improving the technical interfaces of the catalogue, depending on the feedback and comments provided by biobanks and users of the platform.

**Contact information**

Mr Ny Haingo Andrianarisoa
AndrianarisoaN@iarc.fr

¹ http://bbmri-eric.eu/documents/10181/137577/MIABIS+webinar+Jan+22+Loreana.pdf/823ce386-d51e-4930-b2ff-7819f29c932c
Update on the BCNet Catalogue Project

Figure 1. Workflow of the implementation of the BCNet catalogue

Figure 2. Subset of sample data from the BCNet catalogue
The RINC/UNASUR Biobank Operative Group
Meeting in Lima to Delineate
Action Plan for 2017–2018

On 5–6 May 2016, biobanking experts from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela met in Lima, Peru, for the VIIth Ordinary General Meeting of the Biobank Operative Group of the Network of National Cancer Institutes and Institutions - Union of South American Nations (RINC/UNASUR), also known as the Latin American and Caribbean Biobank Network (REBLAC). The meeting took place at the National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases (INEN).

For the first time, representatives from newly incorporated biobanks participated in the meeting. They included representatives from Argentina (General Pediatric Hospital Ricardo Rodríguez), Chile (Pediatric Hospital Luis Calvo Mackenna), and Puerto Rico (University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center and Ponce School of Medicine and Health Sciences).

In addition, reports from the Harmonizing Processes, Minimum Technical Standards, and General Bylaws Committees were presented and extensively discussed, including important aspects for all participants’ biobanks.

During the second day of the meeting, the General Assembly unanimously approved the final draft of the General Bylaws and Action Plan. In addition, the members of the Board of Directors and the Scientific Commission for 2017–2018 were elected. The Board of Directors of the Biobank Operative Group will coordinate and develop a working agenda in conjunction with the Executive Secretariat of RINC/UNASUR.

The Latin American and Caribbean Biobank Network started its activities in 2008 and was incorporated as RINC/UNASUR in 2011. At present, 17 fully established biobanks from the region (and four others that are still in the implementation phase) participate in the Network. In 2013, REBLAC/RINC became a BCNet partner, contributing to all aspects of biobank networking, including regional experiences, harmonization issues, training and technical support, and involvement of governments.

The meeting included round-table discussions of technical-scientific, ethical-legal, economic, and sociopolitical issues related to biobank activities. The role of biobanks in the support and development of oncology research in the region was also discussed.
All of the biobanks have developed structured organizations in order to preserve biological samples (e.g. neoplastic and normal tissue, cells, blood) associated with clinical and epidemiological data from the donor.

All these elements are essential for the development of new technology and cancer research. Specifically, cancer research focuses on the development of biomarkers and new therapeutic banks, among other goals.

The Biobank Operative Group of RINC/UNASUR has been instrumental in the professional development of biobank personnel. As a network, each participant biobank supports other participants, thus providing a strong base for mutual collaboration and growth.

Biobanks are essential elements in the development of cancer research, as they provide high-quality specimens and clinical data in an environment where data safety and ethical management of the samples are essential.

Furthermore, biobank activities also improve the clinical management of cancer patients, as they provide country-specific information critical for the development of effective strategies to prevent, diagnose and treat cancer.

The results of the group’s activities will impact cancer care for future generations in the region.

Contact information
Biobank Operative Group of RINC/UNASUR
General Coordination
Dr Gustavo Stefanoff
National Tumor Bank, National Cancer Institute (INCA) - Ministry of Health (Brazil)
www2.inca.gov.br
 cgstefanoff@inca.gov.br
 biobancos@rinc-unasur.org

Links
RINC/UNASUR: http://www2.rinc-unasur.org/wps/wcm\connect/RINC/site/home/
National Cancer Institute - Ministry of Health (Brazil): http://www2.inca.gov.br/wps/wcm\connect/inca/portal/home
National Institute of Neoplastic Diseases (Peru): www.inen.sld.pe
University of Puerto Rico Comprehensive Cancer Center (Puerto Rico): www.cccu.pr
Ponce School of Medicine and Health Sciences (Puerto Rico): www.psm.edu
Hospital Luis Calvo Mackenna (Chile): www.calvomackenna.cl

Experts in biobanking from Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, Uruguay, and Venezuela at the meeting in Lima, Peru.
The Biobank Lab of the University of Lodz, Poland (Biobank Lodz) was established in 2014, when the biobank started to operate as a separate scientific unit of the Department of Molecular Biophysics. Biomaterials from more than 10,000 individuals throughout Poland and related clinical/questionnaire data had previously been collected from the “Role of multidrug transporters in pharmacokinetics and toxicology - in vitro tests in pharmaceutical and clinical practice” project (Supported by the Polish POIG grant 01.01.02-10-005/08 TESTOPLEK from the European Regional Development Fund). The main goal of TESTOPLEK (as part of a genetic study) was to create a genetic profile of the Polish population.

This collection was involved in the creation of a retrospective POPULOUS collection (POPUlation - LODz UniverSity Biobank) and was registered in 2013 in the BBMRI catalogue of the populations collection (Biobanking and BioMolecular resources Research Infrastructure). In forming the Biobank Lab, the other collection categories, like disease-related or population-based (longitudinal/prospective models), were also included, for example breast cancer patients, pancreatic cancer patients, endometriosis patients, and populations of schoolchildren.

Currently, the main goal of Biobank Lodz is to promote research via the sharing of biospecimens and related clinical/questionnaire data to interested scientific institutions. The next step is to implement policies to share genomic data (microarrays, whole-exome sequencing data, microbiome, targeted genotyping data) related to the different collections.

More detailed goals of Biobank Lodz include:
1. Centralizing the collection across the University of Lodz, and management and storage of biospecimens and associated clinical data of affected and healthy individuals;
2. Performing an essential service by distributing biological samples and making them available to the scientific community; and
3. Elucidating and studying the molecular characterization of the Biobank Lodz samples to improve scientific knowledge of genomic and genetic-related diseases.

The Biobank Lodz policies and procedures were formulated according to the ISBER “Best Practices for Repositories Guidelines”. The laboratory is composed of two main complexes. The Core Lab is the principal place of preparation of biological material for biobanking, and the place of storage of biological material and conducting mass genetic assays and quantitative assessments of selected parameters of deposited biological material. The Big Data Lab is the spare/emergency storage location of biological material, automated microarrays analysis laboratory, and laboratory analysis using next-generation sequencing (NGS) technology.
News from BCNet members and partners

In addition, all bioinformatics analysis is carried out using widely available commercial software.

Biobank Lodz established cooperative relationships with several important and well-known research institutions and companies in Poland: University of Warsaw, Institute of Medical Biology of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Lodz, National Institute of Public Health—National Institute of Hygiene in Warsaw, University of Gdansk, and Proteon Pharmaceuticals SA.

In 2014, Biobank Lodz became a member of the BBMRI.PL Consortium, which is a Polish biobank network in cooperation with Wroclaw Research Centre EIT+, Medical University of Gdansk, Medical University of Warsaw, Medical University of Lublin, Wroclaw Medical University, and Regional Science-Technology Centre in Podzamcze. The Consortium is an initiative of the most developed Polish biobanks to join BBMRI-ERIC as a full member. BBMRI-ERIC is one of the largest health research infrastructures in Europe today, focusing on establishing, operating, and developing a pan-European distributed research infrastructure of biobanks and biomolecular resources.

Contact information
Dr Dominik Strapagiel
Biobank Lab Head
Department of Molecular Biophysics
University of Lodz
strapag@biol.uni.lodz.pl
www.biobank.uni.lodz.pl
biobank@uni.lodz.pl

PATHOLOGISTS IN CANCER MANAGEMENT

The 3rd WADIAP-USCAP School of Pathology/10th Annual Scientific Conference of the West African Division of the International Academy of Pathology in conjunction with the Friends of Africa-USCAP initiative will take place from 29 August to 1 September 2016 in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire.

Topics include:
⇒ Immunohistochemistry and Laboratory Diagnosis of Cancer
⇒ Leadership in Pathology Practice
⇒ Elements of a Quality Management Plan
⇒ Associated Data and LIMS for Data Management
⇒ International Guidelines on Ethics Issues Related to Biobanking
In an attempt to raise awareness and public engagement in Egypt of the concept of biobanking and related issues, including ethical, legal and social issues as well as best practices in sample collection for medical research, the National Liver Institute (NLI), Public Health Department, NLIS-SICRC and the National Cancer Institute (NCI), Pathology Department organized the first biobank conference in Egypt, “Biobanking on the Nile Conference: Implementation and Overcoming Challenges of Biobanking in the Middle East and Limited-Resources Countries”.

The conference was held on 1–2 June 2016 in Cairo, Egypt. The conference presidents were Professor Mohamed Lotayef, Dean, NCI, Cairo University, and Professor Ahmed Elshaarawy, Dean, NLI, Menoufia University. The general secretaries of the conference were Dr Iman Gouda, NCI and Dr Sameera Ezzat, NLI.

This event brought together external and local experts: representatives of universities and governmental and nongovernmental institutions. Dr Maimuna Mendy (Head, Laboratory Services and Biobank Group, International Agency for Research on Cancer, WHO), Dr Maher Sughayer (MD FCAP, King Hussein Cancer Centre (KHCC), Jordan), Dr Nahla M. Afifi (Scientific and Education Manager, Qatar Biobank – Qatar Foundation), and Dr Ma’n H. Zawati (Executive Director, Lawyer Centre of Genomics and Policy – McGill University), who participated via video presentation) were the distinguished external speakers at the conference.

The conference covered the following topics:
1. Importance of biobanks in the advancement of research
2. The NCI and the NLI experience in establishing their biobanks.
3. Biobanking experience in the Middle East and low-income countries
4. Addressing challenges in ethical and legal issues in sample collection for research in Egypt
5. Resources essential for state-of-the-art biobanks
6. Sustainability of biobanks

The conference was well attended by people interested in the biobanking field from different medical schools and biomedical research institutes in Egypt. Active participation was noted from the participants.

The conference started the initiative of building consensus and building communication between different centres for future collaboration in biobanking-related activities. This conference raised the importance of formalizing a biobank task force in Egypt and of the task force communicating biobanking concepts and guidelines to stakeholders.

**Contact information**

Dr Iman Gouda Farahat
✉ iman.farahat@nci.cu.edu.eg
Dr Sameera Ezzat
✉ Sameera.Ezzat@57357.org
News from BCNet members and partners

Progress Made by a South African Biobank as Part of BCNet

The National Health Laboratory Service's (NHLS) National Biobank has made so much progress since joining BCNet in 2013. After the first general assembly of the BCNet group, in 2013, which was attended by Mr Bonginkosi Duma representing the NHLS, three people attended the training and general assembly held at IARC, Lyon, in November 2015. The NHLS staff learned biobank best practices, and the benefit they received was invaluable.

The training included a tour of the IARC Biobank. The information sharing during the training sessions helped us solve some of the challenges we faced in our own biobank. We have also strengthened our processes and added some equipment as part of the biobank disaster management plan, which was advised during the training session by experienced partners of the BCNet.

The two additional staff from NHLS who attended the 2015 training and general assembly have gained more knowledge and confidence in specimen handling and processes. They also felt part of the BCNet family because of the environment and the nature of the training.

As part of BCNet, we managed to gain theoretical training from CTRNet, which partnered with BCNet to give the BCNet members a course in Introduction to Biobanking free of charge. Non-BCNet members had to pay for the course, which is an eye-opener in biobanking.

We will forever cherish the efforts made by Dr Maimuna Mendy for the BCNet initiative and the support we receive from Ms Sally Moldan and the management support from Dr Christopher Wild (IARC Director).

Contact information

Mr Bonginkosi Duma
✉️ bongi.duma@nioh.nhls.ac.za

ANNOUNCEMENT OF
UPCOMING H3AFRICA FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES
July–November 2016

The NIH has recently released seven (7) Notices of Intent to Publish a Funding Opportunity Announcements for the second stage of H3Africa. For more information and links, visit our BCNet website updates: http://bcnet.iarc.fr/about/updates.php
Breast Care International, Ghana

The Breast Care International (BCI) biobank is among the best biobanks in Ghana. The biobank incorporates the current international guidelines and practices in order to ensure that our stored samples are of the best quality. The BCI biobank ensures that approved quality management systems are used. Our biobank also boasts the latest equipment to ensure that our samples are stored under the right storage conditions. The BCI biobank is part of BCI, a non-profit organization dedicated entirely to creating breast cancer awareness in Ghana. The biobank is situated in the Peace and Love Hospital, a hospital specializing in breast cancer care and treatment.

The organization has also been expanding the availability of clinical and diagnostic breast examination in Ghana. Therefore, through our efforts, the number of people who turn up for medical consultation with early symptoms of cancer is increasing. Patients are living longer, and the breast cancer survivor group, Peace and Love Survivors Association (PALSA), inaugurated 5 years ago, has hundreds of members and keeps growing.

As part of its awareness creation, BCI organizes the BCI Ghana Walk for the Cure annually. This year’s walk will take place in Kumasi on 1 October 2016, and 50,000 people are expected to walk for the cure and also showcase survivorship.

Contact information

Dr Emma Brew Abaidoo
✉ emmaabaidoo@yahoo.com
✉ peaceandlove2002@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

♦ 7–10 June 2016  IARC 50th Anniversary Conference
Global Cancer: Occurrence, Causes, and
Avenues to Prevention
Lyon, France
http://www.iarc-conference2016.com

♦ 19–21 June 2016  B3Africa Annual Meeting
Graz, Austria
http://www.b3africa.org

♦ 13–16 September 2016  Europe Biobank Week
Vienna, Austria
http://europebiobankweek.eu/

♦ November 2016  Sub-Saharan Biobanking Workshop
Nairobi, Kenya

♦ 3–8 December 2016  African Society for Laboratory Medicine
Laboratory Medicine in Africa:
Combatting Global Health Threats
Cape Town, South Africa
http://aslm2016.org

Who Are We?

BCNet is the Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMIC)
Biobank and Cohort Building Network, which was established in
2013 to provide a platform for collaboration between its
members, partners, IARC, and the international community.
BCNet aims to support biobanking and cohort-building
activities and to develop sustainable infrastructures for the
management of high-quality biological samples and data for
research, using best practice principles and guidelines.

Contact information

Dr Maimuna Mendy
mendym@iarc.fr
+33 4 72 73 80 35

Ms Sally Moldan
moldans@iarc.fr

http://bcnet.iarc.fr/
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<td><strong>Faculty of Medicine &amp; Biomedical Sciences</strong>&lt;br&gt;University of Yaounde I&lt;br&gt;Cameroon</td>
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<td><strong>College of Health Sciences</strong>&lt;br&gt;Makarere University&lt;br&gt;Uganda</td>
<td><strong>Centre for Infectious Disease Research</strong>&lt;br&gt;Zambia</td>
<td><strong>University of Zimbabwe,</strong>&lt;br&gt;College of Health Sciences&lt;br&gt;Zimbabwe</td>
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