

Girem

Belgian Network on *Gastrointestinal Regulatory Mechanisms*

Society News: Belgian Network on Gastrointestinal Regulatory Mechanisms

Belgium has a long-standing history of active research in neurogastroenterology and motility. This is embodied in the research community “**Belgian Network on Gastrointestinal Regulatory Mechanisms**” (www.girem.be), a research network supported by the Research Foundation-Flanders (FWO), and started 25 years ago under the dynamic leadership of Theo Peeters. The goal of the network is to facilitate collaboration between the different research groups involved and to contribute to the internalization of the scientific research carried out in the participating institutions. The participating Flemish institutions are the Translational Research Center for Gastrointestinal Disorders (TARGID) at the University of Leuven, the Laboratory of Cell Biology and Histology at the University of Antwerp, the Laboratory of Experimental Medicine and Pediatrics, Division of Gastroenterology at the University of Antwerp, the Gastrointestinal Neuropharmacology Unit at the University of Ghent, the Comparative Physiology Unit at the University of Ghent and the Neurophysiology laboratory at the University of Brussels. The Steering Committee is composed as follows: Inge Depoortere, General coordinator (Leuven), Jan Tack (Leuven), Benedicte De Winter (Antwerp), Jean-Pierre Timmermans (Antwerp), Romain Lefebvre (Ghent), Cathérine Delesalle (Ghent) and Jean-Marie Vanderwinden (Brussels). In addition, there a number of international partners are also linked to the network: Qasim Aziz (Wingate Institute, London, UK), Roberto Motterlini (Drug Discovery and Cell Therapy, University of Paris Est Creteil, France), Martin Storr (Gastrointestinal Physiology, LMU Munich, Germany), Vassilis Pachnis (Division of Molecular Neurobiology, National Institute for Medical Research, London, UK) and Rick Maizels (Institute of Immunology and Infection Research, University of Edinburgh, UK).

The FWO funding is used to support guest lectures, symposia and visits for scientific collaboration at the postdoc level. Each year, the network organizes a one-day scientific meeting during the **Belgian Week of Gastroenterology** (www.belgianweek.be), which attracts more than 700 participants. This year, the 28th edition of this meeting was held on the 18th of February in Brussels and was well-attended (up to 150 participants for this session). Besides presentations of abstracts by Belgian researchers (13 selected oral communications and 5 orally presented e-posters), the program included invited lectures by Vassilis Pachnis (London), Dieter Saur (Munich) and Patrice Mollard (Montpellier).

In addition, the network organizes symposia on neurogastroenterology and motility topics. Recent examples are the **Little Brain Big Brain Meeting** (September 2012), mini-symposia on **Mechanisms in the gastrointestinal tract that control food intake in health and disease** (November 2014; international speakers A. Masclee, F. Reimann, W. Langhans, C. Le Roux), **Symposium on the occasion of the retirement of prof P. Pelckmans** (December 2014, University of Antwerp) and on **Development and repair of the enteric nervous system** (February 2016; international speakers R. Hofstra, N. Thapar, H. Young, V. Pachnis). The next symposium will deal with **Colonic motility in health and chronic constipation: from bench to**

bedside (*international speakers M. Costa, J. Huizinga, N. Spencer, R. Lentle, M. Jimenez, G. Bassotti, P. Dinning, R. Spiller, O. Borrelli, C. Di Lorenzo, M. Benninga, A. Bharucha*) and will be held in Leuven on September 8th 2016.

Thanks to the network and the dynamic groups it comprises, Neurogastroenterology and Motility research in Belgium is highly active and internationally highly prominent beyond the small size of the country and population. There is a strong research tradition from basic to clinical research in the field. Only in the last two years (2014 and 2015), 13 PhDs were defended by members of the network, and Neurogastroenterology and Motility researchers in Belgium published more than 150 peer-reviewed papers in the international literature, including journals like the New England Journal of Medicine, Lancet, Nature Genetics, Gastroenterology, Gut, Scientific Reports, Neuroimage and Neurogastroenterology and Motility.

More information can be found on the website of the network (www.girem.be) and of the participating groups (www.targid.eu, www.uantwerpen.be/en/rg/celw, www.uantwerpen.be/en/rg/lemp, www.ugent.be/ge/pharmacology/en/research-groups/gastro-intestinal/overview, <http://www.ugent.be/en/@@departments?ugentid=DI01>, www.ulb.ac.be/rech/inventaire/unites/ULB193) .