

Call for Research Proposals in the Area of Osteoarthritis

Osteoarthritis (OA) affects a substantial proportion of the European population. The OA burden in terms of individuals and health economies will likely be rising in coming years due to ageing and increased prevalence of obesity. The aetiology of OA is complex as is the involved multi-tissue pathology. Risk factors for OA onset and progression differ between anatomical sites, with most research focusing on the knee. Current treatment guidelines recommend holistic patient assessment with combination of pharmacological and non-pharmacological symptom-based therapies. However, these therapies are limited in efficacy, tolerability and adherence issues and consequently many people with OA continue to have pain and poor quality of life.

The European Rheumatology Research Foundation (ERRF), supported by EULAR, recognizes the growing burden of OA and the substantial unmet therapeutic need in this area. ERRF has therefore initiated this Call, prepared in consultation with a group of experts who identified priorities in this field. The aim of this call is to elicit proposals from the community in line with these priorities.

As part of this call for proposals, the European Rheumatology Research Foundation will support projects on the following areas of osteoarthritis research:

- **Predictors of progression of OA**

One focus includes the investigation of biomarkers in clinical studies (e.g. molecular or imaging), and their relation to (multiple) outcomes of OA, as well as the study of the natural history of the disease. Expected benefits from such studies would be an improved definition of the phenotype (or subtypes) of OA for clinical trials and for the work in existing databases.

- **Mechanisms of pain in OA**

One central feature of OA is pain. Proposals investigating the origin of pain in OA and its interrelation with other aspects of the disease are encouraged. A potential benefit gained from studies in this area could be the identification of novel targets for pain management.

- **Treatment strategies in OA**

Despite the currently still limited therapeutic options in OA, the identification of optimal strategies to employ all available therapeutic means is another goal of this call. This can include the investigation of individualised therapies, or the comparison of different therapeutic options, such as monotherapy or combination therapy.

- **Early OA**
Particular attention will be given on studies dedicated to the understanding of development of OA (e.g. by expanding pathogenetic insights), as well as to improvement of definitions of OA (i.e. by diagnostic or classification criteria).
- **Tissue communication in OA**
Finally, ERRF encourages research proposals that focus on the interaction of tissues involved in the pathogenesis, maintenance, and progression of OA. This might be the investigation of bone-cartilage interaction in OA, the molecular and cellular inflammatory processes relevant to OA, and other similar investigations.

Eligibility

ERRF primarily encourages collaboration across Europe and therefore expects multi-centre project applications involving partners from at least two, preferably more, different countries. Any given institution shall be allowed to lead on only one application. However, that institution, or its staff may participate in other projects as collaborators.

The call shall be open to participants from the global scientific community; however, we stipulate that the Principal Investigator should come from a EULAR membership country. Similarly, whereas participating centres may be from outside Europe to provide necessary expertise, the majority of contribution should be from EULAR member countries.

Budget

The ERRF OA call is designed to fund a range of research projects. An individual proposal may be funded with up to 150,000 Euros per year for up to three years, provided the expenditure is appropriately justified.

Projects will be subject to an interim evaluation of progress and will have to offer a written final report. Submitted publications can be used as part of the report.

How to apply

Applications should be made electronically (email to info@errf.net). Necessary application forms can be downloaded at www.errf.net.

Letter of intent

All applicants considering submission of a proposal are invited to send a short letter of intent by 1 September, 2013 to ERRF (email to info@errf.net). The structure and required content of the letter of intent are described in the 'Letter of Intent template' available from the ERRF webpage. Letters of Intent will be assessed by members of the ERRF scientific committee and applications deemed meritorious of full application will be selected on a competitive basis. The Secretariat will respond by 20 September, 2013 as to whether the proposal meets the scope, priority and requirements of the call such that a full application will be invited.

Full project proposal

Applicants so selected will be invited to submit a full proposal; they will be sent the Full Project Proforma template. To facilitate review by patients, additionally a Lay Summary must be completed at this stage. Both forms will be provided to applicants invited to submit a full proposal. Full research proposals must be submitted electronically by 30 November, 2013 to the ERRF Secretariat.

Evaluation and decision

The proposals will then be externally, independently peer-reviewed to evaluate their feasibility, novelty, design, relevance and potential impact relative to the subject matter of the call. Based on this peer review, the ERRF Scientific Committee will make a funding recommendation to the ERRF Executive Committee, which will make its funding decision at its meeting early 2014. Decisions will be communicated to the applicants by the ERRF Secretariat by 15 February 2014.

Ethical aspects

ERRF expects a high standard in the conduct of research it funds. For researchers this includes scientific integrity and adherence to the principles of good research practice. Patients subjected to investigation shall be included with due adherence to the declaration of Helsinki.

Declaration of Interest forms as currently applied to participants in EULAR activities will be completed by all applicants.

Structure and content of research proposals

Research proposals must include the following information on no more than 5 A4 pages (font 12):

1. Title of research
2. Applicants (name, organization, professional position) and their anticipated contribution(s)
3. Abstract (200 words)

4. Background and research objective(s)
5. Justification of the need for multi-centre collaboration (100 words)
6. Relevance to specific ERRF call, if issued (100 words)
7. Methodology (e.g., design, sample size, statistical analysis methods etc.)
8. Key anticipated outcomes and proposed metrics to measure success
9. Project organization and timeline
10. Milestones of the project
11. Budget

Management of the Call

The ERRF call and approval process will be administered by the ERRF Secretariat, together with the ERRF Scientific Committee.

Call schedule

Call issued:	30 June, 2013
Letter of intent:	1 September, 2013
Decision on Letter of Intent:	20 September, 2013
Closing date for proposals:	30 November, 2013
ERRF decision:	31 st January, 2014
Decisions announced:	15 February, 2014
Projects to begin by:	May, 2014

Inquiries

For general inquiries please contact the ERRF Secretariat at info@errf.net