



## THE EUROPEAN HIV/AIDS & INFECTIOUS DISEASES ACADEMY - AN EDUCATIONAL, RESEARCH INSTITUTION FOR CENTRAL AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE

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During the summer of 2009, the European HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases Academy has been inaugurated in Bucharest, Romania, as an educational, research institution created for defining clinical, epidemiological and logistic particularities in the HIV infection for Central and South-Eastern Europe, aiming to optimize the management of this infection.

The European HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases Academy has been established by the Decision of the Romanian Government no. 943 / 19 Aug. 2009, published in Romania's Official Gazette (*Monitorul oficial*) no. 608 / 03 Sept. 2009. The European Academy is recognized by both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education of Romania.

The past decade has engendered a marked evolution in HIV/AIDS treatment methods. As such, the universal access to ARV therapy entailed improvement of human capacity, infrastructure, equipment availability, as well as systems and planning. On global level, there are few countries with lengthy experience in the field, while developing countries are in demand of training and system organizing programs. The *aim* of the European HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases Academy located in Bucharest, Romania is to answer these challenges, offering direct access to the theory and practice of infectious diseases (state-of-the-art treatment and care) to national and international professionals. The *mission* of the Academy of HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases is establishing the physical and virtual platform for bringing together experts and expertise regarding HIV/AIDS in Central and South-Eastern Europe, thus increasing the individual and institutional professional ability on national and regional level, offering top facilities, based on the most recent and comprehensive information and state-of-the-art technology regarding the diagnosis, treatment and complex care required for AIDS.

The *specific objectives* of the Academy of HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases are: defining clinical, epidemiological and logistic particularities in the HIV infection in Central and South-Eastern Europe, aiming to optimize its management; completing a regional research database in the field of HIV/AIDS; developing a virtual platform that will host and operate the regional HIV/AIDS research database; using this virtual platform for postgraduate training in HIV/AIDS; developing and disseminating an online regional HIV/AIDS journal; supporting fundraising for scientific research projects on HIV/AIDS or related topics proposed by affiliate countries.

The European Academy of HIV/AIDS and Infectious Diseases, as component of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș", offers a variety of *training and education* programs bearing the immense advantage of providing direct access to patient-care activities, to experts, to cutting edge equipment and to the most advanced procedures.

So far, two Masters programs have been approved by the Romanian Ministry of Education: (1) Techniques of Phenotypic Characterization for Molecular Determinants of Virulence and (2) Identification of New Microorganisms for Defining the Pathogenic Cause-Effect Relationship. Their commencement is scheduled for the university year 2010-2011. Relevant updated information will be posted on the site of the Academy ([www.aidsacademy](http://www.aidsacademy)).

The courses and training will benefit from the certification of the Romanian Ministry of Health, the University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Carol Davila” Bucharest, the Medical Sciences Academy, and the College of Physicians – Romania.

The undergraduate students from the Bucharest University of Medicine and Pharmacy „Carol Davila” also benefit from the Academy's infrastructure, logistics and IT database during their infectious diseases courses and follow-up; hence an increased quality of the educational process. The post-university continuing medical education (CME) courses for physicians, as well as the thematic round tables and the symposia, developed at the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “Prof. Dr. Matei Balș”, are also beneficiaries of the Academy's state-of-the-art facilities.

The Academy is open to accommodate CME for nurses and midwives as well.

The Central and South-Eastern European founding countries and *affiliates* to the HIV/AIDS Academy are: Albania, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine. A number of experts from these countries have been identified and have joined the *Experts Group* which will elaborate a common strategy for the Central and East-European countries in the field of fighting HIV/AIDS and infectious diseases.

At this point, 40 members from the affiliate countries have joined the Experts Group and this number is expected to increase over time, as activities develop within the departments of the Academy: research, education and advocacy.

In agreement with the decisions made during the HIV/AIDS Academy's *inception meeting* in November 2008 in Paris, Romania, Prof. Dr. Adrian Streinu-Cercel is chairing the organizing committee of the Academy and is voluntarily providing support for the technical secretariat of the Academy.

The ceremony of *inauguration* of the Academy's facilities, held in Bucharest, in June 2009, was an opportunity for experts to meet and discuss the progress on international level. The stated objectives of the meeting were to define regional areas of cooperation in relation to HIV/AIDS treatment, care and support and to discuss and agree on specific mechanisms that the European Academy can use in order to support activities in the respective areas of cooperation. Participants included treatment and social experts from 10 countries, representatives of European community networks, of the private sector and of international programs (UNAIDS).

The following topics were discussed for upcoming *research projects* which are to be evaluated by an international Experts Evaluation Committee for granting future financial resources: Starting ARTV in Naïve Patients (Albania); CNS and How to Avoid Metabolic Clinical Adverse Events (Romania); Management of HIV Co-infection with HBV and HCV (Bulgaria); Prevention of Vertical Transmission (Ukraine); Adherence to the Antiretroviral Therapy (Romania); Man Having Sex with Men (Czech Republic); Management of MDR TB Co-infection (Romania); Travel Medicine and HIV (Croatia); HIV and the Metabolic Syndrome (Romania); HIV Co-infection with Parasites (Croatia); HIV Treatment and Cardiovascular Risks (Romania); Co-infections with STDs and Herpes Viruses (Romania); HIV-infected Patients Models of Care (Romania); Epidemiological Aspects in Central and Eastern Europe (Romania); Monitoring Fatty Liver in Naïve HIV Patients and HAART (Romania); Management of IDUs (Latvia); Survey of HBV, HCV, HDV Viruses Co-infection with HIV (Romania); Quality of Life in HIV-infected Adults (Romania); Psychiatric Disorders in HIV-Infected Patients (Romania).

During the *3<sup>rd</sup> Experts Meeting*, several project proposals developed under the above-mentioned topics have been presented by the respective group leader. Members of the Experts Group have been invited to join the agreed-upon areas of cooperation, according to their expertise and interest. The *4<sup>th</sup> Experts Group Meeting* took place in Bucharest on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2010. The grounds were set for an Epidemiological Survey on HIV co-infection with HBV, HCV, HDV and STDs in Central and Eastern Europe. The information provided through the Survey will make the following possible:

- having a clearer picture of the shared/divergent experiences;
- identifying strengths and weaknesses of the network;
- having grounds for communication;
- identifying specific partners for future projects;
- identifying fields where sharing expertise is crucial.

In addition, the gathered data is necessary for the *feasibility study* required in order to access funding for the projects listed within the Academy's List of Areas of Cooperation.

The European HIV/AIDS & Infectious Diseases Academy is undergoing the process of ISO 9001:2000 *certification*, as part of the re-certifying process taking place within the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Prof. Dr. Matei Balș" (INMB) during 2010. The European Academy benefits from the expertise and experience of the highly specialized HIV/AIDS experts from the INMB, internationally recognized by WHO and ECDC.

Since early February 2010, the Therapeutics Pharmacology and Clinical Toxicology Journal has also become the journal of the European Academy. We would be honored if experts from countries affiliated to the European Academy agreed to become members of the international board of this journal. Members of the Experts Group are more than welcome to submit articles which the journal is open to receive, review and publish. We look forward to a long-term collaboration in this respect.

For more details and updates, a web page is available both in English and Romanian at: [www.aidsacademy.org](http://www.aidsacademy.org)