

EMA

Transparency takes time

► **London/Brussels** – After delaying the finalisation of its new information policy on the publication of results from clinical trials of approved medicines, the EMA announced in March it will complete negotiations in mid-June. Agency plans to proactively release clinical trial data faced stiff opposition from the pharmaceutical industry, which wants to keep trade secrets and distinct data under its control. Originally, the EMA had been planning to present new rules governing how to grant researchers access to anonymised patient-level data on 1 January 2014, but over 1,000 comments on its draft policy and litigation with Intermune and Abbvie have delayed publication of the hotly-debated rules. ◀

FRANCE/EU

Cola contribution

► **Paris/Brussels** – A French proposal to put a tax on junk foods whose consumption is linked to cardiovascular disease has been added to next year's EU Council agenda. Senators Yves Daudigny (PS) and Catherine Deroche (UMP), who drafted the report "Taxation and public health: evaluation of behavioural taxation", are aiming specifically to slap a 20% tax on soft drinks in a legislative attempt to limit the risk of cardiovascular disease and cardiovascular events. The report concludes that the tax could partly help compensate for the public health costs that result from junk-food consumption. According to recent research, serious cardiac events can occur in genetically predisposed people who have consumed energy drinks. "Our objective is to say that certain products are unhealthy," says Deroche, who will present the report to French Health Minister Marisol Touraine. EU ministers will discuss a health regulation in response to the report next year. ◀

Heard in Brussels

■ Throwing out the baby with the bathwater

Brussels – As we all know, the European Commission is under intense pressure to reduce costs and shed the image of being a gravy train. This is a favourite topic at the national level in the ongoing fight against the reign of terror from Brussels.

The irony is that the era of eye-watering salaries and mansions on leafy avenues actually ended some time ago. While there are still plenty of Commission people who live very well – courtesy of getting their feet under the table back in the old days – many new staff face short contracts, lower wages and substantially less sexy perks. I am all for the European Commission employing people on a realistic level (i.e. like the rest of us), but I am having problems with additional changes in structure that somebody thought was an 'efficiency'.

One cut too many?

The EC is a huge funding body, driving innovation and industrial development across Europe. To do that, it needs passionate and motivated staff who are integrated into the heart of the scientific process. Based on what I have seen myself and heard from plenty of others, the increased use of external agencies to administer project funding isn't serving collaborative research well. Sure, the agencies come cheaper and let the EC talk about reducing costs, but the direct result is that you get people paid to administer – not to add value to – world-class research collaborations.

Another irony is that there is a queue of people 10km long wanting to work for the Commission, and it includes talented scientists and project managers. So why make them just administer project reports? Managing collaborative research is really hard, we all know



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that, so why not invest a bit more to ensure that it actually works? These guys would work on the same salaries as you pay external staff. In fact, I bet that those external staff would jump at the chance to stretch their brains beyond correctly completed personnel tables.

Investing in results

The fact is that the European Commission will always take the heat for national issues. It is a useful whipping boy on any aspect of money because its budgets are so huge, and it always looks shifty because its answers are necessarily complicated. The Commission is not going to win any debates at national level, regardless of how much it cuts budgets, so it should stand up and say that it is proud to have skilled Project Officers working as partners with the projects that it funds. Then those projects have the maximum chance of delivering the results that they were funded to achieve, while the Directorates delivering the funding can also see the fruits of their labour and assess the effectiveness of their policies. ◀

