



European Society of Human Genetics

Proposed statement (for consultation) on

Formal recognition of medical genetics¹ as a medical specialty in Europe

To aid the provision and development of genetic services for individuals and families in Europe, the European Society of Human Genetics believes that there is an urgent need for medical genetics to be recognised as an independent medical specialty at the European level. Several countries have in place training programmes leading to medical specialist status as a medical (clinical) geneticist, but the European Society of Human Genetics believes that there are many advantages for the specialty to be recognised internationally, in particular to enable the full impact of the Human Genome Project to be translated into practice across all specialities.

Indeed, the EU Concerted Action on Genetic Services in Europe (CAGSE) recommended that such official recognition was a crucial step towards improving the availability and access to genetic services for patients and the availability of genetic information for health professionals. Several other reports have also identified the key role of professionals with specific training in medicine and genetics in the planning, introduction and delivery of medical genetics services. Aspects of genetic medicine encompass all specialties, but sound arguments have been advanced for having medical specialists trained in genetics. Particular skills include: pedigree interpretation, understanding the need for family studies and their organisation and interpretation, appreciating human variability in health and in inherited diseases, understanding genetic mechanisms of disease and how these may give rise to disease in a particular individual, undertaking complex risk calculation incorporating information from genetic and other medical tests, being able to undertake non-directive genetic counselling and having detailed understanding of genetic laboratory test results. Such specialists can also play a major role in supporting training in medical genetics for non-genetics health professionals in other medical specialties.

The Public and Professional Policy Committee of the European Society of Human Genetics has prepared a document on Genetic Services in Europe (<http://www.eshg.org>). The document discusses the definition and aims of genetic services, the role of a medical geneticist, the relationship of medical genetics with other specialties, and the assessment of quality of medical genetic services. The Committee will be publishing recommendations for genetic services for wide consultation in the summer of 2001.

The ESHG believes that the benefits of recognising medical genetics as a specialty will include

- 1 the establishment and implementation of training programmes
- 2 the identification of resources required for service and training
- 3 recruitment to the specialty in its own right
- 4 the development of relationships between medical geneticists and other specialties
- 5 the dissemination of information to and training for non genetics health professionals

In view of these benefits, the European Society of Human Genetics requests that

- 1 those with responsibilities for establishing and maintaining high quality health services (eg health care providers, health politicians, chambers of physicians) support the establishment of medical genetics as a designated specialty in their country.
- 2 the Presidents of National Human Genetics Societies in those countries where medical genetics is recognised as a specialty ask their national Health Administration Department to

request that medical genetics be recognised as a medical specialty in Europe by submitting a request to the EU Committee of Senior Officials on Public Health.

Footnotes

1 For the purpose of this statement the term “medical genetics” is synonymous with the term “clinical genetics”.

2 EU directive 93/16/EEC facilitates the free movement of doctors and the mutual recognition of their diplomas, certificates and other evidence of formal qualifications. Article 4 states that each Member State will recognise the formal qualifications in specialised medicine awarded to nationals of Member States by the competent authorities or bodies of other Member States. Article 6 states that some countries award qualifications in a specialised branch of medicine which has been formally constituted by national regulations in that country, but that the branch of medicine may not be formally recognised for all Member States. Article 24 lays down minimum requirements for training leading to a formal qualification in specialised medicine. Medical genetics is currently afforded status under Article 6, but the European Society of Human Genetics is proposing that medical genetics be designated a specialty under Article 4.

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