

# EAPC Research Network: the Junior Forum

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**Knudsen** and **Stein Kaasa** explain how the Junior Forum of the European Association for Palliative Care Research Network (EAPC RN) aims to encourage young researchers

Palliative care research is entering a new and exciting era. Springing from the seeds of advocacy in the early 1980s, and facilitated by the foundation of the European Association for Palliative Care Research Network (EAPC RN) in 1996, palliative care research is today attracting international funding and recognition.<sup>1</sup> It has risen to the fore of the national political agenda in several countries and is affirming its role in the international research arena.<sup>2,3</sup>

There is a growing number of palliative care research units worldwide and more young clinicians and scientists are getting involved in this important aspect of palliative care.<sup>4</sup> In the UK, for example, research is an integral component of palliative care specialist training. However, the process of conducting research is more complex than it was ten years ago. Getting ethical, scientific and regulatory approval is arduous and time-consuming; multicentre trials are

increasingly necessary to recruit adequate sample sizes; and the multiprofessional research teams are getting larger.

This 'global warming in the palliative care research environment'<sup>5</sup> gives rise to opportunities and challenges that must be anticipated. To meet these challenges, the next generation of researchers should be given the opportunity to develop the specialist skills required for success. They need to learn the skills necessary to participate in, and lead, research groups; they must be able to develop research programmes and build long-lasting and effective international collaborations.

## A platform for education, communication and collaboration

To meet the needs of young researchers in palliative care, the EAPC RN Junior Forum (JF) was set up, in May 2008, to provide a platform for education, communication and collaboration. The aim is to build a strong foundation for the delivery of high-quality, effective and collaborative palliative care research, which will improve palliative care at a clinical, scientific and social level.

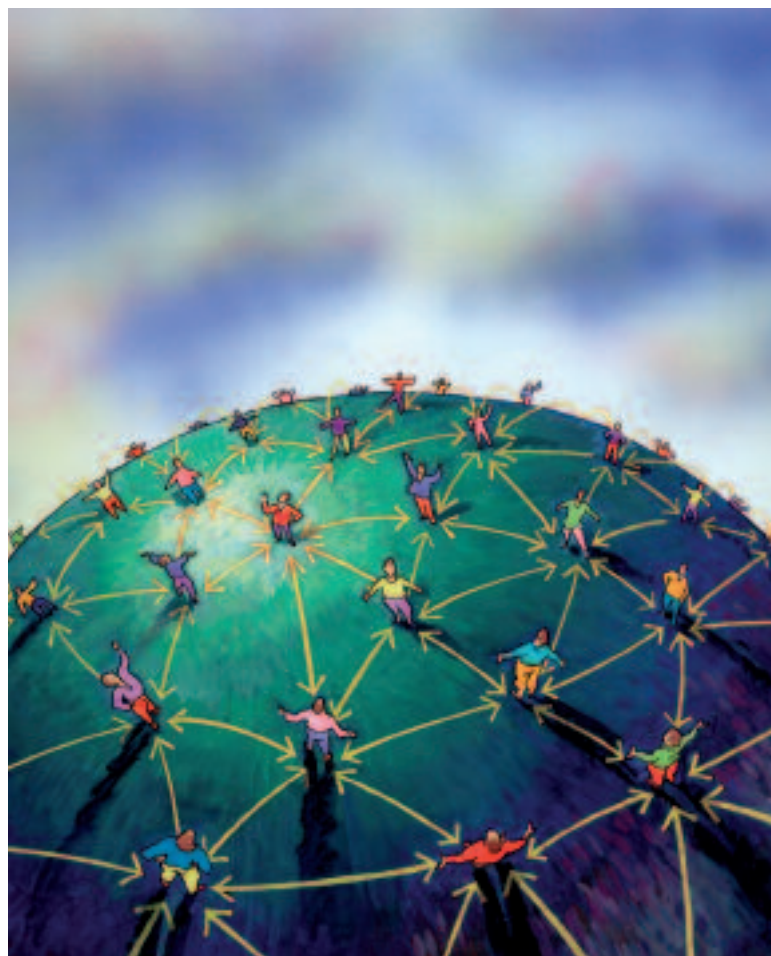
The JF sprang from the desire of young researchers to become part of the solution to providing better palliative care. The initiative has been motivated by their wish to reach out to international colleagues with similar levels of experience and to share in the excitements and challenges faced in this field of medicine.

## Enthusiastic support for the concept

Support for the concept of the JF was assessed before its launch, via an email questionnaire circulated to individuals on the EAPC mailing list; 83 questionnaires were returned, representing 30 countries from five continents.

## Key points

- There is a growing number of palliative care research units worldwide and more young clinicians and scientists are getting involved in this important aspect of palliative care.
- The next generation of researchers must be able to develop research programmes and build long-lasting and effective international collaborations.
- The European Association for Palliative Care Research Network (EAPC RN) Junior Forum was set up in May 2008 to provide a platform for education, communication and collaboration for young researchers.
- The EAPC RN Junior Forum hopes to serve as a meeting place where individuals can learn about research, share experiences and develop working relationships.



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The respondents expressed their enthusiasm for the concept.

Respondents included doctors, nurses, scientists and allied healthcare professionals; they comprised a broad range of experience, research backgrounds and age groups; 52% were aged 25 to 35, 24% were aged 36 to 45, 22% were 46 or older and 2% were of unknown age.

Sixty per cent of respondents worked in the field of palliative care, 12% in the field of general practice and 13% in oncology or anaesthetics; 60% were affiliated with a university, with 88% holding, or working towards, a higher postgraduate degree.

Ninety-two per cent of respondents were already involved in research, with the majority carrying out qualitative and/or quantitative studies; 39% were running clinical trials, but only a small proportion were involved in laboratory work (10%), normal volunteer studies (6%) or animal work (1%).

Respondents were asked to disclose the main

topics of their research and were able to tick as many as applicable. Results showed the most popular research topics to be cancer (42%), pain (41%), other cancer-related symptoms (42%), assessment and measurement tools (37%) and organisation of services (29%). Research in non-cancer patient populations accounted for 16%; research in policy (11%) and in bereavement (8%) were the least reported topics.

At the launch of the initiative, at the 5th Research Forum of the EAPC in Trondheim, Norway, in May 2008, participants discussed how a junior forum could meet the needs of young researchers in palliative care and why this might be important. They also put forward suggestions on how to take the JF forward. These views and ideas are outlined in Table 1 (page 234).

### Aims of the Junior Forum

The JF hopes to serve as a meeting place where individuals can learn about research, share experiences and develop working relationships. It aspires to achieve greater understanding between scientists and healthcare professionals to create productive working environments, and seeks to make the experience of research more satisfying and less isolated via an online community. Through its activities, the JF hopes to increase awareness of palliative care research among the wider clinical and scientific communities, and encourage greater commitment from funding bodies.

The relationships and skills resulting from this approach will be the building blocks for the future of palliative care research. Collaboration on local, national and international levels is essential to the development of palliative care research, helping to achieve comparative and adequately powered clinical studies, and furthering the evidence for the provision of best care.

### Structure and activities of the Junior Forum

The JF will be driven by a committee of young researchers who will advocate for the members. Committee members will be recruited from all countries, so that every aspect of palliative care research is represented. Membership is encouraged for those at the start of, or early on in, their research career, but there is no age limit. The goals and activities of the JF will be shaped by the contributions of its members and

**Do you want to write about your experience of research?**

The *EJPC* is keen to promote research in palliative care and welcomes contributions in this area.

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**Table 1. Summary of the feedback from the pre-conference questionnaire and from participants at the launch session of the EAPC RN Junior Forum**

<b>The EAPC RN Junior Forum is a place where members would like to:</b>	
Learn about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General principles of research (what research is and is not)</li> <li>• Trial methodologies and how to choose the right one</li> <li>• Statistics and data analysis</li> </ul>
Find out how to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get started in research • Write a research curriculum vitae • Get work published</li> <li>• Write grants and get funding</li> </ul>
Have detailed discussions on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to do a PhD • Pitfalls and difficulties in research • Strategies for problem-solving</li> </ul>
Be involved in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group discussion • Social activities</li> </ul>
Have the opportunity to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share ideas and expertise • Learn about each other's work</li> <li>• Discuss topics directly with experts and colleagues in the field</li> <li>• Meet international research partners, including those representing psychological medicine, social sciences and humanities</li> </ul>
<b>The EAPC RN Junior Forum will be important because:</b>	
It offers the opportunity for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing ideas with others • The transfer of knowledge and information • Discussion</li> <li>• Social and scientific networking • Young researchers to present their own work</li> <li>• Young researchers to ask questions</li> </ul>
It has the potential to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance training and boost education in research-related topics</li> <li>• Help neglected areas of research gain acknowledgement</li> <li>• Facilitate multicentre trials through collaboration</li> <li>• Establish a strong foundation for the future of research</li> </ul>
It will help	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individuals to get started in research</li> <li>• Young researchers to develop skills for research</li> <li>• Young researchers to make the most of their research experience</li> <li>• To disseminate information about educational and collaborative opportunities</li> <li>• To counter the isolation sometimes felt by young researchers</li> <li>• To teach young researchers more about the work of the EAPC</li> <li>• To make it easier for young researchers to get to know one another</li> </ul>
<b>The EAPC RN Junior Forum hopes to achieve its goals through:</b>	
An online forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the dissemination of information • As a platform for discussion</li> <li>• As a portal for online courses in research-related topics</li> <li>• Where an individual's research work can be highlighted</li> <li>• Where research opportunities can be advertised</li> </ul>
A secure webpage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where individuals can post their research profiles</li> </ul>
Satellite conferences at EAPC meetings (for example, half-day sessions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For lectures on specific themes given by experts</li> <li>• For young researchers to present their own experience of research</li> <li>• For presentations on research-related topics</li> <li>• Where researchers can meet via the format of 'speed-dating'</li> </ul>
Summer school programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To foster informal internships and visiting scholar exchanges</li> <li>• With a view to developing specific PhD/masterclass programmes</li> <li>• With a view to developing educational courses</li> </ul>
An organising committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formed and convened via an online forum</li> <li>• Led by the needs and involvement of Junior Forum members</li> </ul>
Co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With PhD/teaching programmes already being established, for example in Australia and the USA</li> </ul>
<b>The EAPC RN Junior Forum should be cautious not to:</b>	
Reinvent the wheel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By setting up courses that are already readily available</li> </ul>
Neglect areas of research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By failing to represent properly less mainstream fields of research</li> </ul>
Key: EAPC RN = European Association for Palliative Care Research Network	

# EJPC online

there will be sessions dedicated to the interests of the JF at the 6th Research Congress of the EAPC in Glasgow, in June 2010.

The activities of the JF will be driven by the needs of young researchers and will take into account suggestions and contributions from its members. The activities require formulating and will involve preparation and planning – a principal role for the JF committee. Broadly, it is hoped that activities will encourage people to participate in research, and it is hoped that an online forum will be developed to open lines of communication between members.

## The way forward

The future of palliative care research relies on effective and long-lasting collaboration between palliative care research units. The JF hopes to encourage the development of people's skills so that they will be equipped to lead palliative care research well into the 21st century.

**Find out more about the Junior Forum at: [www.eapcnet.org/](http://www.eapcnet.org/) or at: <http://eapcrn.org/>  
To contact the Junior Forum launch committee, please email: [eapcrn.juniorforum@gmail.com](mailto:eapcrn.juniorforum@gmail.com)**

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