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**Common Healthcare Plan**

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The Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche is the main public research body in Italy. CNR's activities range from biology to medicine, mathematics, physics, economics, engineering, law and the humanities. Some years ago a bureau was set up for scientific and technologic cooperation with the Mediterranean countries (SMED). SMED has the purpose of encouraging cooperation among public and private institutions in Mediterranean countries in view of a further social, economic and cultural development of these regions. This initiative plays an important political role, especially in times of tense relationships among the countries. A lasting peace in this area will also be the result of cultural integration among peoples and the overcoming of social imbalances between rich and poor countries. Scientific research can and must play a leading role in this field.

SMED devoted an important part of the available funds to medicine, to encourage the establishment of research teams able, thanks to their experience, large numbers and extensive technologies available, to deal with the most important medical issues concerning the Mediterranean countries. The successful introduction of neurorehabilitation among the branches covered is for me a reason for satisfaction and encouragement also considering that neurorehabilitation, although being of great clinical interest, is still hardly considered as a leading scientific discipline.

Our first goal was to create an international network across the various Mediterranean countries. This network includes the Universities of Ancona and Naples (Italy), the Burden Neurological Institute in Bristol (United Kingdom), Loewenstein Hospital in Ra'anana (Israel) and the Rehabilitation and Physical Medicine Departments of the Universities of Alexandria (Egypt) and Ankara (Turkey).

Thanks to the initiative undertaken, many researchers have been visiting laboratories and hospitals in the participating countries, in order to be able to compare health-care standards and to understand the specific needs for intervention in the various territories. In other words, a first step was taken towards the planning of common research projects, among groups working in social, cultural and medical environments quite different from one another.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta, that has a long-standing tradition and state-of-the-art tools in healthcare, is capable of contributing with ideas and human resources. The same is true for the Accademia Melitense. I take this opportunity to invite H.E. the Grand Chancellor and the Honorable Rector of the University of Malta to act as promoters of possible synergies between the CNR, SMOM and the Accademia Melitense.

Scientific research requires significant financial resources in general; individual countries can hardly manage to fund all scientific projects adequately. The European Community may contribute to fund raising, although EU investments involve mostly broad-range, socially oriented projects. Neurorehabilitation may be proposed as priority discipline in funding programmes, provided that a valid research team is set up, dealing with scientific projects capable of addressing advanced issues. Therefore, a sharing of scientific interests will be crucial for the development of future activities.

I recall with pleasure my work with the St. John the Baptist Hospital in Rome, begun in the eighties and to which I was committed for over fifteen years. It was for me an experience rich in interesting and innovative results.

The quantitative analysis of EEG has showed that the process of recovery is quite a long one.

In certain cases, bioelectric activity still tends to change and to assume a physiological morphology and rhythm even six months after the event. The test results that showed a macroscopic evidence of neuronal plasticity are confirmed today by researches that make use of more sophisticated technologies. It is the theoretical basis for the need to extend rehabilitation over long periods of time in order to favour neuronal re-organisation and functional recovery.

Many other issues need to be addressed. How do serious strokes develop in the long term? Should funds for rehabilitation be allocated only according to economic criteria? Does neuro-psychologic training have any positive impact on functional recovery in general?

The rehabilitation of mental retardation in evolutive age is another field of great interest. Rehabilitation centers for teenagers have been working for years with the same standard protocols, therefore young patients are less stimulated and the efforts made by medical professionals are often nullified. Can computer science help in trying new rehabilitation strategies?

It will be easier to answer these questions by pooling the efforts of multiple research groups. The disease is the same in all countries, yet intervention and recovery methodologies are typical of the various territorial areas. The development of a valid rehabilitation protocol, integrated in the specific social and cultural milieu of each country and without of any cultural and political restrictions, is a challenge that few countries can meet alone.

I hope this Forum will be a starting point for future cooperation in the field, and also that SMOM and the Republic of Malta will participate in this project.