

## French Court of Auditors Calls for Spending Control Over Health Insurance Savings

by Dr. Bernard Gouget

SFBC-EFLM Representative; IFCC Treasurer;  
Secretary General, International Francophone Federation  
of Clinical Biology and Laboratory Medicine (FIFBCML)

A report on laboratory medicine was ordered by the Court of Auditors (Cour des comptes) in December 2012 by the Social Affairs Committee of the French Senate. This document contains 16 recommendations. The most dramatic is the renewal by tacit agreement between health insurance and directors of medical laboratories in order to renegotiate new legislation, and a decrease of EUR 0.02 (EUR 0.27 to EUR 0.25) for key letter B, allowing a saving of around EUR 220 million for health insurance. This measure provoked a strong reaction from private laboratory medicine specialists who are trying to negotiate a multi-year plan for spending control with health insurance, demonstrating their good will and responsibility.

The Court of Auditors noted at the

outset that laboratory medicine expenses have recorded strong growth since 2000, although there has been a slowdown, the annual rate falling from over 9% between 2001 and 2003 to 2.5% between 2007 and 2011, before declining by 1.6% in 2012. The total fees for community laboratory medicine rose from EUR 2.63 billion in 2000 to EUR 4.31 billion in 2012 (9.6% of community medicine health expenditure), to which must be added EUR 453 million in spending by clinics (for a total of EUR 4.76 billion). This represents a cost of EUR 3.4 billion for health insurance in 2012.

In public hospitals and private non-profit facilities, the Court of Auditors notes that laboratory medicine expenses are not sufficiently tracked, since they are included in rates. According to the Court's estimates,



spending reached EUR 2.4 billion 2011. The ongoing reductions in the coefficients for certain procedures, implemented since 2006 for health insurance, have contributed to the slowdown in spending (EUR 697 million saved for the Caisse nationale d'assurance maladie des travailleurs salariés (National Health Insurance Fund for Salaried Workers, CNAMTS) between 2006 and 2012, but the number of procedures continues to grow (+4.6% per year since 2006). Between 2000 and 2011, the volume of procedures increased by 63.2%, while the volume index of all community health-care only grew by 35% during the same period, which could be partially explained by technological innovations and the key role of laboratory medicine in the course of patient care. However, it was noted that spending still remains poorly controlled and that testing is still overprescribed.

The Court reports that the laboratory medicine sector has seen a lot of changes, due to the impact of the reform initiated in 2010 and then clarified and confirmed by the Act of May 30, 2013. This restructuring has not concerned the laboratory medicine community or in vitro diagnostics providers. Indeed, the French government desires a more determined action to lower costs and provide health insurance with the significant savings that productivity gains allow.

The French Court of Auditors noted the particularly demanding but essential nature of the procedures for mandatory accreditation. Simultaneously reconciling restructuring and accreditation is not easy. Currently, France has gone from 5000 to 1328 laboratories in September of 2013, of which 243 representing 750 sites are accredited. Legal consolidation is accelerating, but not necessarily the closing of local sites, whose number remains stable. Furthermore, medical laboratories are stalling for time; many dossiers for proof of actual entry into accreditation arrived just before the deadline of May 31, 2013, which could overload the evaluation capacity of the French Accreditation Committee (Cofrac) as accreditation thresholds approach, in particular the one for 2016, by which 50% of the tests for each family must be accredited! The movement toward restructuring and pooling of resources is still too dilatory in the hospital setting; only 27 hospi-

tals are accredited, but all hospitals have submitted their dossiers. Hopefully, with appropriate support, the equality between community and hospital laboratories sought by the reform will be safeguarded. Accreditation must enable laboratory efficiency and performance to be improved. In addition, the government is encouraged to provide better support for the movement, particularly by publishing implementing regulations for the reform and improving data collection and cost analysis. Precise progress indicators, shared between Cofrac and the Ministry of Health are desirable. There is a need for national leadership for reform, ensuring regional health agencies (ARS) are provided with effective regulation of laboratory medicine.

To control spending, the Court of Auditors is calling for major revision of the coding for laboratory medicine procedures simultaneously with an overhaul for noncoded procedures whose initial mission, limited to innovative procedures still being validated, has been distorted. We must accelerate the production of good practice standards and guidelines and fund noncoded procedures performed by health facilities based on their actual activity. Furthermore, the Court of Auditors is also calling for more active support of actions to improve hospital efficiency, especially by the development of "connected prescription" (computerized links among clinicians, laboratory medicine specialists, and managers), and better interoperability of information systems for correct prescription.

Via the reforms in progress throughout Europe and internationally, it is clear to see that laboratory medicine is playing an increasingly central role in national health policy.

Balancing the healthcare budgets on the backs of medical laboratories is a growing trend. Hospital-based clinical laboratories in different countries are being reorganized by government health programs. These moves are intended to further consolidate medical laboratory testing into larger regional lab facilities and achieve lower costs through economies of scale. However, ongoing reductions to medical laboratory budgets over a number of years may stifle innovation and make it difficult to maintain high quality and accurate medical laboratory testing services. The key issue is to promote healthcare safety. By their dynamic approach and networking and benchmarking among European countries, laboratory medicine specialists are fully able to implement a cohesive and innovative approach even in an economic and political context forcing their specialty to take the vanguard in care pathways.

  
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## Croatian Society Celebrates 60th Anniversary

This year, the Croatian Society of Medical Biochemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CSMBLM) is celebrating its 60th anniversary. The celebration was held on October 4, in Zagreb and consisted of an official and social program. The gala party at hotel Westin was attended by 250 members of our society as well as by honored guests and dear friends from abroad: Victor Blaton, Gabor Kovacs, Simone Zerah, and Giuseppe Lippi. During the official program, a monograph in honor of this big anniversary was presented. Since CSMBLM has a long tradition in cooperating with international scientists and experts, we decided to promote three distinguished professors into our honorary members: Andrea Rita Horvath, Simone Zerah, and Giuseppe Lippi. This is our way to thank them for their dedication to advance the field of laboratory medicine worldwide.

### Society's Journal Gains in Stature

Publishing activities of the CSMBLM are related to the society's scientific journal *Biochemia Medica* ([www.biochemia-medica.com](http://www.biochemia-medica.com)). It publishes articles by Croatian and international authors, dedicated to professionals from laboratory medicine and various fields of biomedicine that share the same interests. *BM* is indexed in Medline, SCIE, JCR, Thomson



Photo: Coauthors of the monograph in honor of the 60th anniversary

Reuters, EMBASE/Excerpta Medica, Scopus, CAS, EBSCO/Academic Search Complete, and DOAJ.

The journal's impact factor since the year 2009 is continuously raising, and for the year 2012, we are celebrating its highest impact factor ever, 1.873! *Biochemia Medica* is now Journal number 13 within the JCR MEDICAL LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY category. Furthermore, our journal is now ranked as the number one Croatian journal, across all scientific disciplines, with the highest impact factor.

*Biochemia Medica* has grown into the interna-

tionally appreciated Journal with distinguished scientific and professional scope and character, being recognizable for papers on quality management, preanalytical phase, biostatistics, and research integrity. We would like to thank to all who contributed to this great success: authors, reviewers, assistant editors, and editor-in-chief, Prof. Ana-Maria Simundic, whose hard work and enthusiasm made this possible. We hope that this achievement will keep attracting high quality submissions and wide readership across the world.

## EuroLabFocus



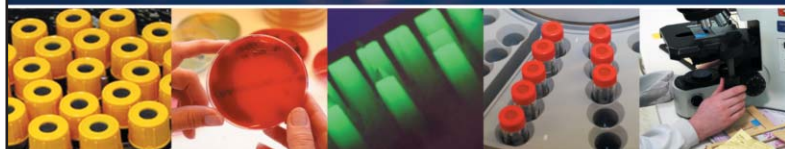
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## Serbia's 9th EFLM Balkan Symposium Treats Cutting-Edge Topics

by Dr. Snezana Jovicic, Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia

Nine years ago, EFLM appointed the Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia as host of educational symposium for clinical chemists of the Balkan region. This year's 9th EFLM Symposium for the Balkan Region, entitled "Integrative Algorithms in Patient Focused Laboratory Medicine" was organized under the auspices of the IFCC, Balkan Clinical Laboratory Federation, Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Serbia, and Ministry of Health of Republic of Serbia. The two-day symposium was held from October 3–5 as part of the EFLM Committee of Education and Training and EFLM Working Group on Congress and Postgraduate Education activity in 2013.

The first session was dedicated to the introduction to molecular-genetic diagnostics and molecular genetic markers, as a base for personalized medicine, presented by two leading Serbian scientists in this field – Prof. Ivana Novakovic (Institute of Human Genetics of Belgrade's University School of Medicine, Serbia) and Prof.

Sonja Pavlovic (Institute of Molecular Genetics and Genetic Engineering of University of Belgrade, Serbia). Afterward, we had the honor to hear about the incorporation of molecular diagnostics in clinical laboratories and quality assurance in molecular biomedicine and life sciences from the two leading experts in these fields, Prof. Mario Pazzagli (Department of Clinical Physiopathology, University of Florence, Italy) and Prof. Michael Neumaier (Institute for Clinical Chemistry, Medical Faculty Mannheim of University of Heidelberg, Germany).

Second session was dedicated to patient focused management of thrombophilia. This complex topic opened with the lecture about its molecular basis, presented by Dr. Valentina Djordjevic (Institute of Molecular Genetics and Genetic Engineering, University of Belgrade, Serbia). The talk about the laboratory investigation of thrombophilia followed through the comprehensive presentation of Dr. Sandra Margetic (Department of Laboratory Haematology and



Photo: Members of the 9th EFLM Symposium for Balkan Region Organizing and Scientific Committee with lecturers. (From left to right: Dr. Sandra Margetic, Dr. Andjelo Beletic, Prof. Mario Pazzagli, Prof. Elizabeta Topic, Prof. Nada Majkic-Singh, Prof. Ksenija Fumic, Prof. Sonja Pavlovic, Dr. Zorica Sumarac, Prof. Svetlana Ignjatovic)

Coagulation, University Hospital Center, Zagreb, Croatia). The session was closed with the presentation of principles of integrative approach to patient with thrombophilia, when Dr. Gorana Matic from the Department of Haematology, Haemostasis, and Prevention of Thrombosis (Laboratory Medicine Center, Clinical Center of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Serbia), presented their experience in this field.

Session three was dedicated to the detection of molecular defects in the field of endocrinology. The lecturers from the Clinic of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolic Diseases of Clinical Center of Serbia and University of Belgrade's School of Medicine brought us closer to understanding the application of molecular diagnostics in the management of endocrine tumors. We had the privilege to hear about integrative protocols in evaluation of multiple endocrine neoplasia from the distinguished Prof. Svetozar Damjanovic, and Dr. Dragana Miljic presented molecular defects in the pathogenesis of pituitary tumors. The role of pharmacogenetics in the treatment of diabetes was elaborated in the presentation of the esteemed Prof. Elizabeta Topic, Chair of the EFLM Committee of Education and Training, and professor at the Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry of University of Zagreb, Croatia. The session was closed with the lecture about molecular genetics and molecular cytogenetics in the evaluation of congenital heart defects, presented by Dr. Goran Cuturilo from the Department of Clinical Genetics, University Children's Hospital of the University of Belgrade's School of Medicine, Serbia.

The session following was dedicated to pharmacogenomics, and opened with the introduction by the distinguished Prof. Gerard Siest, from the research unit "Cardiovascular Genetics" of the Nancy University of Lorraine's Faculty of Pharmacy, France, with the emphasis on its future evolution and the

role of the European Society of Pharmacogenomics and Theranostics (ESPT) in it. Prof. Irena Mlinaric-Rascan from the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Pharmacy, Slovenia, gave a talk about the pharmacogenomics of thiopurine S-methyltransferase and presented her work in this field. The session was concluded with the lecture about pharmacogenomics of drugs for cardiovascular system, presented by Dr. Sanja Stankovic (Center for Medical Biochemistry, Clinical Center of Serbia).

The Symposium's closing session was dedicated to rare diseases. Prof. Ksenija Fumic from Clinical Department of Laboratory Diagnostics of Medical Center of Zagreb and University of Zagreb's Faculty of Pharmacy and Biochemistry, Croatia, in her comprehensive lecture opened the session and presented integrative algorithms in diagnostics of lysosomal storage diseases. The talk about molecular basis, clinical presentation, therapeutic options, and integrative approach in diagnostics of alpha-1-antitrypsin deficiency was presented jointly, from the aspect of both the laboratory and clinical practice professional, by Dr. Andjelo Beletic, from Center for Medical Biochemistry, and Dr. Aleksandra Dudvarski-Ilic, from Clinic of Pulmology of Clinical Center of Serbia. Dr. Maja Stojiljkovic-Petrovic, from the Laboratory for Molecular Hematology of University of Belgrade's Institute of Molecular Genetics and Genetic Engineering, concluded the session with her presentation of molecular characteristics, phenotypic diversity, and genotype-estimated therapeutic responsiveness of Serbian patients with phenylketonuria.

All sessions were extremely well visited and about 250 registered participants and students attended the Symposium. The lectures prompted interesting discussions, which completed the overall impression that once again Society of Medical Biochemists of Serbia organized a successful meeting according to the EFLM standards.

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## 11th Greek National Congress Held at University of Volos

by Dr. Alexander Haliassos,  
Gen. Secretary of GSCC-CB

The 11th Greek Congress of Clinical Chemistry held on October 11–12, 2013, under the auspices of the University of Thessaly, in the premises of the University at Volos, concluded late in the afternoon last Saturday.

This important regional annual meeting was organized by the Greek Society of Clinical Chemistry - Clinical Biochemistry (GSCC-CB), with the scientific support of the Biochemistry Department of the Hospital of Volos, under the supervision of Dr. Elias Togousidis, Chairman of the Organizing Committee and Director of the Biochemistry Laboratory of the "Achilloupoleio" General Hospital of Volos. At the opening ceremony, Dr. Konstantinos Hatzis was honored for his contribution to the field of Clinical Chemistry. Dr. Hatzis is the first Director of the Biochemistry Laboratory of the "Achilloupoleio" General Hospital of Volos, and although retired for some years, still actively participates in scientific events.

The conference was honored by the presence of the Member of the Executive Board and Treasurer of the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC), Dr. Bernard Gouget, who made the opening presentation entitled: "Trends in healthcare: challenges and opportunities for IFCC and laboratory medicine," developing the role of IFCC in the advancement of Laboratory Medicine and the improvement of health care, but also participated in a round table titled: "on the way to the Accreditation of the Clinical laboratory" with another presentation with subject: "Improving patient safety through medical laboratory accreditation". In the same Round Table where presented, the topic of Proficiency Testing Schemes (the ex. External Quality Control programs) from the administrator of the 'ESEAP - The Greek Proficiency Testing Scheme for Clinical Laboratories' Dr. Otto Panagiotakis, and the efforts and accomplishments of Biochemistry Laboratory of the "Achilloupoleio" General Hospital of Volos towards his imminent accreditation.



Photo: Dr. Bernard Gouget (on the left), Member of the Executive Board and Treasurer of the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC), Dr. Bernard Gouget, during the opening presentation; accompanied by Dr Alexandre Haliassos and Dr. Ilias Togousidis President of the congress.

Noteworthy was the presence of the associate dean and professor of the Department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology at the University of Thessaly, Dimitris Kouretas who presented during the opening ceremony the subject "Nutrition: Lessons from the past to the future" and contributed substantially to the organization of the conference generously offering the Amphitheater of the University for the Congress's sessions, as also as the Library for the opening reception.

Particularly important was also the role of the Associate Professor of the School of Medicine at the same University and Chairman of the Scientific Committee of the Conference, Mrs. Eftihia Asproini and of many faculty members of the Medical School and of the Technological Institute "TEI" of Thessaly.

Conference participants included the President Katerina Psara, all members of the board and committees of GSCC-CB, as well as Dr. Alexander Haliassos, President of "EuroMedLab 2017" which is scheduled to be held in Athens.

During all the sessions of the Congress participated actively about 200 colleagues and students from all over Greece, especially from the region of

Thessaly, and presented 10 lectures, 20 oral presentations and about 25 posters. There were also organized three Round Tables and two Satellite Symposia. After each presentation, a constructive exchange of views and discussion took place between the presenting specialists and the audience and enriched the delegates with all new trends and accomplishments in Laboratory Medicine.

## Clinical Chemistry Trainee Council Launches Question Bank



The Trainee Council of the journal Clinical Chemistry has recently launched a question bank to help those preparing for certification or college, or other exams in clinical biochemistry or laboratory medicine and those wishing to assess their knowledge. The question bank is available as web- and mobile-based applications. It was launched with 1,000 questions, with >2,000 other questions in the process of being uploaded. All questions have been peer reviewed or reviewed by crowd sourcing.

If you are a trainee, or a mentor, or a lab manager involved in staff training and training assessment and wish to access the question bank, please register at [www.traineecouncil.org](http://www.traineecouncil.org). It takes 30 second and is free of charge.

Kind regards,

Prof. Andrea Rita Horvath, MD, PhD,  
EurClinChem, FRCPPath, FRCPA  
Past President of the European Federation of  
Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine  
Clinical Director, SEALS North, Department of  
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## An Invitation: EuroLabFocus 2014 Liverpool, October 7-10

by Gilbert Wieringa, Chair, EuroLabFocus 2014; Dr. Ian Watson, President, EFLM;  
Dr. Lena Norlund, President, Section of Biopathology, UEMS

**W**elcome to Liverpool, welcome to the third joint conference of the Union of European Medical Specialists (UEMS) and the European Federation of Clinical Chemistry & Laboratory Medicine (EFLM) to be hosted by UK's Association for Clinical Biochemistry, and incorporating their annual national meeting, Focus 2014.

The conference brings together Europe's Specialists in Laboratory Medicine in a scientific program that focusses on laboratory medicine's practice and contribution to health and healthcare across Europe. Where do we overlap in what we do? Where do we differ? What can we learn from each other? More details of a program that reflects our roles at the clinical interface and stimulates us to consider how we can enhance our contribution will follow in successive articles for ACB News.

For industry, the conference is the key platform for engaging delegates across Europe. Participation packages include opportunities for wider involvement and promotion; Liverpool's BT Convention Center allows easy access to exhibitors wishing to launch their latest advances in technology. The exhibition center will form an integral part of the scientific program.

### Liverpool

Following Lisbon (2010) and Dubrovnik (2012), Liverpool is proud to be the host city for this Congress series; appointed a UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 2004 as well as The European Capital of Culture in 2008, Liverpool is a thriving, bustling conurbation at the heart of North West England. We are delighted that Liverpool's BT Convention Center will act as host venue. Opened in 2008, it is a stunning waterside location close to the Grade 1 listed Albert Docks (home to Tate Liverpool and The Beatles Story), Liverpool One shopping centre and the famous ferry across the Mersey. The Walker Art Gallery is home to a stunning collection of paintings and sculpture from the 13th century to the

present day. Other museums around the city include the World Museum, Merseyside Maritime Museum, International Slavery Museum, and the Museum of Liverpool. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is the UK's oldest surviving professional symphony orchestra dating from 1840 and gives over 60 concerts each season in its hometown under the leadership of Chief Conductor Vasily Petrenko. From time out at a waterfront cafe to wining and dining in the cultural quarter, the choice is endless. With 5,000 luxury and budget hotels within walking distance of the center, a good night's sleep is never far away.

### The Science Program

The emerging program is designed to appeal to individual laboratory medicine disciplines as well as a strong cross-disciplinary theme focusing on the patient's interaction with laboratory medicine. Topics include Patient empowerment, Childhood diabetes, presenting data for patients, a debate on "over-the-counter" point of care testing, Tackling the alcohol epidemic. The ACB's Education Committee will be organizing two training days over October 6-7, with a multidisciplinary theme. Updates on the full scientific program will follow in further articles.

### Social Program

The social program is delighted to be able to promote many attractions in and round the BT Convention Center including: The Albert Docks, Liverpool's cathedrals, The Walker Art Gallery, The Cavern Club, Magical Mystery Tour, The Williamson Tunnels.

### Tuesday, October 7

**Welcome Reception at the Museum of Liverpool.** The Museum of Liverpool reflects the city's global significance through its unique geography, history, and culture. Visitors can explore how the port, its people, their creative and sporting history have shaped the city.



### Wednesday, October 8

**Reception in the Exhibition Hall.** For delegates and diagnostics industry representatives alike, a chance to relax after the day's events before venturing out to see the sights in and around the conference center and hotels. As well as opportunities to access some of the venues mentioned above, or spend an evening in one of the many restaurants in and round the Albert Docks and Liverpool One.

**Late night: Focus Fringe at the Pan Am Blue bar situated in the Albert Dock.** An annual event for Focus conferences pulling together aging lab rockers and budding singers in a succession of blues and rock bands that never quite made it to the top of the charts but knew how to have a good time. Book early, it's usually a sell-out!

### Thursday, October 9

**Conference Dinner – St George's Hall.** Situated within walking distance of the conference center and hotels, St George's Hall is widely regarded as one of the finest neoclassical buildings in the world. The hall opened to the public in 1854 and it is a World Heritage venue. Enjoy an evening amongst friends and colleagues accompanied by a string quartet, followed by the opportunity to dance along to one of Liverpool's DJ's.

### Save the dates!

Keep an eye on the web site ([www.eurolabfocus2014.org](http://www.eurolabfocus2014.org)) and on Twitter (@eurolabfocus) for the latest updates on the program, registration information, bursary awards, and newsbreaks as they happen. We look forward to meeting old and new friends in Liverpool in 2014.



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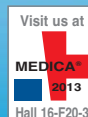


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