## EHFG 2013: THE PRESTIGIOUS EUROPEAN HEALTH AWARD GOES TO A PREVENTION PROJECT FOR IDENTIFYING NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

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*Every week, a new psychoactive substance pops up on the Internet. There is barely any knowledge about the effects and health risks of these drugs. ReDNet is a multinational project aimed at identifying and researching these dangerous chemicals and provides evidence-based information to risk groups, health care providers and policy makers. The innovative project received the renowned European Health Award at the European Health Forum Gastein.*

**Bad Hofgastein, 3 October 2013** – This year’s European Health Award and its 10,000 euros cash prize went to the Recreational Drugs European Network (ReDNet). The multicentre project is aimed at identifying new psychoactive substances sold online and improving the information stream to vulnerable individuals, especially young people and professionals working with them, via a range of innovative technological tools. It won out over five other cross-border initiatives that were also nominated for the renowned prize of the European Health Forum Gastein (EHFG).

“I would like to thank the European Health Forum Gastein for this important award also on behalf of my ReDNet colleagues based in ten research centres across the European Union and research collaborators, including the EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction), who made this possible through hard work and effective partnership,” ReDNet Manager Dr Ornella Corazza from the University of Hertfordshire said. “The recent emergence of new psychoactive substances (NPSs) has led to unpredictable challenges in terms public health in Europe. These products are often advertised on the Internet as legal and safer alternatives to illicit drugs. They appear very quickly on the drug market in ever more sophisticated forms and may well have widespread and long-term effects on users' health. These products are just a 'click away' from our homes and thus potentially available to everyone, especially young people who are amongst the most at risk. So far in 2013, more than one new substance has been reported every week. It is a challenge that needs rapid and innovative responses. This European Health Award is an acknowledgement of our efforts to respond quickly and innovatively to this challenge.”

Many of the new psychoactive substances are research chemicals, often waste products from drug research. What all substances have in common is that they are produced mainly in Asian countries and usually on a large scale. Until now, little to nothing has been known about their possible effects, interactions and health risks. In this alarming context, ReDNet, sponsored by the European Commission, was able to improve intelligence and generate original data on the availability and misuse of over 700 new psychoactive substances and products containing them by monitoring the Internet on a daily basis in eight different languages and disseminating evidence-based information via a multitude of tools such as mobile phone technology, virtual learning environments, video-clips, social networking and a large number of scientific publications. Dr Corazza: “ReDNet currently provides information on new psychoactive substances and services to vulnerable individuals, health and other professionals, policy makers and regulatory authorities in over 30 countries. This has increased awareness of risks, health prevention initiatives, policies and treatment provision in a rather unique way.”

**Promotion of cross-border initiatives**

“The project has been matchless in improving risk awareness, leading to more initiatives and policy decisions for prevention-based health measures and contributing to an increase in available therapies. It shows once more the fundamental importance of multidisciplinary and multinational cooperation in getting quickly spreading phenomena such as new psychoactive substances under control“, EHFG President Prof Helmut Brand said in his praise of the project. “The achievements of ReDNet are an eloquent example that cross-border cooperation is not just useful but in many cases such as these, simply indispensable.”

**About the European Health Award**

The European Health Award honors projects and initiatives that are helping to improve health care in Europe. The main criteria are that more than one European country has to be involved in a project and that the results must be transferable to other states and directly benefit a substantial part of the population or relatively large patient groups. The award is supported by the Austrian Ministry of Health and by FOPI, which brings together Austria's research-based pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

“From the perspective of the Austrian Ministry of Health, the European Health Award is given out to set an example inside and outside the ministry to support innovative cross-border projects and to render them more visible to the public,” Dr Clemens Martin Auer, Director General in the Federal Ministry of Health in Vienna, explained. “The EHFG is the ideal setting for giving out this type of award because the winning projects can benefit additionally from the diversity of institutions represented there and from the presence of key individuals who shape the further development of European health policy.”

“FOPI is delighted to sponsor the European Health Award where health-related projects in Europe are being supported. General living conditions, demands and health-related societal challenges have changed in recent decades. Innovation in medicine and pharmaceuticals is a necessary part of addressing these changing general living conditions, and can help us live healthier lives. The key to this is research and development on an international scale. The winning project provides the model example of this multinational collaboration,” states Ingo Raimon, President of the Austrian research based industry association (FOPI).

The European Health Award was instituted in 2007 by Prof Dr Günther Leiner, Honorary President and founder of the EHFG. Prof Leiner emphasized that a major motivation for the award was to promote cross-border cooperation in health policy and added: “This backing is even more important today. The current health problems are more diverse and more complex than ever, being further exacerbated by demographic change and by the austerity measures arising from the economic crisis. A cross-border agenda in health policy, cooperation among multiple countries and the development of transferrable initiatives have never been as crucial as they are today.”

**The nominated projects**

A total of six cross-border projects made it into the finals of the European Health Award 2013. They cover a broad range of subjects such as air pollution, the multinational provision of health care, improvement in patients’ communication with health care providers, policy decision-makers, researchers and journalists, prevention of hospital-acquired infection, also known as a HAI or in medical literature as nosocomial infection, or assistance in understanding letters from physicians.

“Resilient and Innovative Health Systems for Europe” is the slogan for this year's EHFG. More than 550 participants from some 45 countries are attending Europe's most important health policy conference in Bad Hofgastein to exchange views on key issues affecting European health systems.

[www.novelpsychoactivesubstances.eu/rednet](http://www.novelpsychoactivesubstances.eu/rednet)
Photos from the award ceremony for download: <http://www.ehfg.org/1012.html>

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