
STATEMENT ON SPINAL CORD INJURY REGENERATIVE RESEARCH JUNE 2011

About 2.5 million people live with a spinal cord injury (SCI) globally. In Europe at least 330,000¹ individuals suffer from the condition, with about 11,000 new cases every year. Apart from the disastrous social and human consequences², a recommendation from the Council of Europe (REC 1560 (2002))³ highlights the huge economic cost⁴ incurred and concludes "Council of Europe member states should make greater concerted efforts with a view to supporting and financing research in this area."

The European Spinal Cord Injury Federation (ESCIF) has been committed to supporting and promoting SCI research since its foundation in March 2006. The federation has been actively involved in initiating information-gathering projects among its members and has collaborated with SCI professionals and researchers in European research efforts. The ESCIF statutes underline the federation's support for research that will enhance the quality of life of people living with SCI – but do not mention research into functional recovery. In 2006, in Europe, the possibility of a "cure" for paralysis seemed a rather remote prospect.

Since then, however, neuroscience has made significant strides towards curing paralysis so that some degree of functional recovery is now a realistic goal. Many promising lines of research are currently undergoing clinical trials across the globe and many more are preparing to go to human trials. In order to promote scientific breakthroughs and their successful translation to humans, substantial support, funding and infrastructure is essential.

We, ESCIF, representing hundreds of thousands of people living with SCI throughout Europe, strongly support regenerative research for spinal cord injury to help reverse paralysis in those millions already injured, and those yet to be.

Therefore we urge the Council of Europe member states, the EU and the EU member states to support and invest in regenerative research for spinal cord injury by:

- Increasing funding for basic, translational and clinical aspects of regenerative research for spinal cord injury
- Enabling timely translation of promising lines of research from laboratory to the bedside through sufficient funding, efficient infrastructure and collaborative networks
- Facilitating the adoption of suitable regulation and legislation to allow for efficient and timely translation of promising lines of research without compromising patient safety and ethics
- Setting up and implementing a Spinal Cord Injury Cure Plan making the cure of SCI a national and trans-national priority

Lastly, it should be remembered that promising regenerative research in the field of spinal cord injury will also contribute to research for other neurological conditions such as Multiple Sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's.

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¹ Source: Recommendation 1560 (2002) 1 /Council of Europe *Towards concerted efforts for treating and curing spinal cord injury*

² Consequences of a spinal cord injury include: Loss of the use of limbs, loss of sensation, lack of control of bowel/bladder and sexual function, plus untreatable neuropathic pain, spasticity and threat of infection, inability to breathe (high cervical injuries)

³ Recommendation 1560 (2002) 1 /Council of Europe op.cit.

⁴ Cost generated by SCI: "In the United States, the aggregate costs of spinal cord injury have been estimated at US\$9.73 billion per year". Source: Recommendation 1560 (2002)1 / Council of Europe op.cit.