

HCERES

High Council for the Evaluation of Research
and Higher Education

Research units

HCERES report on research unit:

Epithelial Carcinogenesis: Predictive and Prognostic
factors

CEPP

Under the supervision of
the following institutions
and research bodies:

Université de Franche-Comté

HCERES

High Council for the Evaluation of Research
and Higher Education

Research units

In the name of HCERES,¹

Michel Cosnard, president

In the name of the experts committee,²

Joakim Dillner, chairman of the committee

Under the decree N^o2014-1365 dated 14 november 2014,

¹ The president of HCERES "countersigns the evaluation reports set up by the experts committees and signed by their chairman." (Article 8, paragraph 5)

² The evaluation reports "are signed by the chairman of the expert committee". (Article 11, paragraph 2)

Evaluation report

This report is the sole result of evaluation by the expert committee, the composition of which is specified below.

The assessments contained herein are the expression of an independent and collegial reviewing by the committee.

Unit name: Epithelial Carcinogenesis: Predictive and Prognostic factors

Unit acronym: CEPP

Label requested: EA

Current number: EA 3181

**Name of Director
(2015-2016):** Ms Christiane MOUGIN

**Name of Project Leader
(2017-2021):** Mr Jean-Luc PRETET

Expert committee members

Chair: Mr Joakim DILLNER, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden

Experts: Ms Nathalie JACOBS, University of Liege, Belgium

Scientific delegate representing the HCERES:

Mr Jean ROSENBAUM

Representative of supervising institutions and bodies:

Mr Lamine BOUBAKAR, Université de Franche-Comté

Head of Doctoral School:

Mr Patrick PLESIAI, Doctoral School n° 554, "Environnements-Santé"

1 • Introduction

History and geographical location of the unit

The EA 3181, entitled “Epithelial Carcinogenesis: Predictive and Prognostic factors” was created in 1996. It is located at the faculty of medicine and pharmacy at the university of Franche-Comté in Besançon. The research group works on both fundamental and clinical aspects of cancer, working to understand the mechanisms leading to the development of epithelial cancers that may or may not be associated with Human Papilloma Viruses (HPV). A wide variety of different research topics have been investigated from molecular biomarkers of virus-induced tumors to cancer patient quality of life. Other objectives are to propose innovative approaches to primary and secondary prevention and therapeutic management, and to evaluate the impact of new treatments on the quality of life of patients with cancer. To be able to manage this variety of scientific interests, the research unit has developed an impressive number of national and international collaborations, which were concretized by numerous co-authorship publications

Management team

The unit is under the direction of Ms Christiane MOUGIN. As of the beginning of 2017, she will be succeeded by Mr Jean-Luc PRETET.

HCERES nomenclature

SVE1_LS7 Epidémiologie, santé publique, recherche clinique, technologies biomédicales

SVE1_LS6 Immunologie, microbiologie, virologie, parasitologie

Scientific domains

Molecular mechanisms of cancer.

Viral infections as causes of cancer.

Immunotherapy of cancer.

Cancer prevention and epidemiology.

Unit workforce

Unit workforce	Number on 30/06/2015	Number on 01/01/2017
N1: Permanent professors and similar positions	13	9
N2: Permanent researchers from Institutions and similar positions	5	5
N3: Other permanent staff (technicians and administrative personnel)	4	5
N4: Other professors (Emeritus Professor, on-contract Professor, etc.)	2	
N5: Other researchers from Institutions (Emeritus Research Director, Postdoctoral students, visitors, etc.)		
N6: Other contractual staff (technicians and administrative personnel)		
N7: PhD students	12	
TOTAL N1 to N7	36	
Qualified research supervisors (HDR) or similar positions	15	

Unit record	From 01/01/2010 to 30/06/2015
PhD theses defended	9
Postdoctoral scientists having spent at least 12 months in the unit	
Number of Research Supervisor Qualifications (HDR) obtained during the period	1

2 • Overall assessment of the unit

Introduction

Over the last period, the team has been very productive, listing >300 international publications often published in top-ranked journals. There are noteworthy contributions in a variety of fields, such as HPV in skin cancer, mechanisms of HPV-induced carcinogenesis in anogenital cancers as well as a prominent clinical research portfolio on several epithelial cancers, performing large clinical trials with noteworthy results on improved treatment and studies on quality of life. The HPV-associated work has progressed well and follows the development of the field. The proposed strategy is to focus on this line of research for the future.

Global assessment of the unit

The unit is characterized by a large output of careful and solid work in several areas of cancer research on epithelial tumors. Their past and future main topic is cancer associated with HPV infection. Their research is patient-driven with access to patient samples or epidemiological data and participation to clinical trials. The research unit has national and international recognition. Although the team has undoubtedly been interdisciplinary, synergistic effects are not so clear and a focusing of the efforts may be required. The proposed strategy to focus more on HPV-related work is encouraged.

Strengths and opportunities in the context

Major strengths include a productive track record of careful and solid research (from the last evaluation: 289 papers were published of which 78% are cancer-related, the first and last author IF median is nearly 3), an effective interdisciplinarity and an international and national network of collaborations. There is also a strong track record in research training.

Weaknesses and threats in the context

Although the unit is productive in terms of number and quality of publications, it is more difficult to clearly pinpoint what the five major findings really are. Research is performed in too many areas that are not obviously interlinked (the interactions and the coordination between the 13 scientists associated to the unit is not clear). The internationalization could be even more strengthened, for example by recruiting international post-docs and students. The number of national and international grants is small. The committee is concerned that the team may be stretching itself too thin. The more focused effort that the unit proposes for the next five years could have a strong impact.

Recommendations

The team will most likely benefit from the proposed focusing further on a single subject of research (HPV and HPV-associated cancers). These could be approached using a variety of interdisciplinary approaches (basic science on molecular mechanisms, immunotherapy, clinical and epidemiological studies, etc.). The interest in biomarker studies and their clinical and epidemiological validation could be developed further. The publication strategy should be more focused on a smaller number of higher impact publications in the same line of research. Although international collaborations and collaborations with industry are described and are interesting, the funding is limited and the team could benefit from focusing only on well-funded projects. Leading clinical investigators and the well-known director will be leaving, and the new director will have a challenging task to ensure smooth continuation and continued improvement.