

The unseen life in and around us Launch of the Luxembourg Society for Microbiology

Luxembourg, 27 June 2016 - Microorganisms, despite their notorious reputation as disease-causing agents, play essential roles in our daily lives and are integral to the maintenance of human health. Startling is the fact that at least as many microbes live in and on us as human cells comprise the body. The field of microbiology is currently undergoing a true renaissance with a panoply of chronic diseases having recently been linked to changes in the microbial communities that inhabit for example the human gastrointestinal tract. In order to consolidate the activities in the field of microbiology on the national level, the Luxembourg Society for Microbiology (LSfM) was recently founded.

Luxembourg has a long-standing tradition in microbiology, having rapidly translated the principles of Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch into its medical practice at the turn of the previous century. Nowadays, all public research institutions in Luxembourg (the Integrated BioBank of Luxembourg, the Luxembourg Institute of Health, the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology, the Luxembourg National Health Laboratory and the University of Luxembourg) are active in this domain, and several public, clinical, commercial and industrial activities also exist. So far, many of these activities have been unconnected but a critical mass does already exist, hence the need for consolidating expertise and interests in the form of the new society. “Bringing together all the actors in microbiology on a national level has been a long-standing ambition. It is fantastic to see this aspiration now come to fruition in the form of the LSfM!” says Dr. Joseph Even, President of the society and former head of the Virology Department of the National Health Laboratory (LNS). With the new society we want to bundle our expertise on a national level. This will not only allow us to enhance our capabilities in Luxembourg but this will also contribute towards enhancing our visibility internationally.” underscores Dr. Christian Penny from the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology (LIST) and the society’s Secretary General. In this context, the LSfM will become a member of international organisations including the Federation of European Microbiological Societies and the International Human Microbiome Consortium.

Through the advent of modern analysis methods, the field of microbiology is currently undergoing a technology-driven revolution and scientists are now able to study microbes directly in their native habitats, for example the human body, in biogas plants as well as on food. “Microbes are absolutely everywhere. With the new tools we are learning much about their amazing capabilities. Luxembourg has recently pioneered a number of new microbiological methods and is poised to become a world-wide recognised player in the field.” highlights Prof. Dr. Paul Wilmes from the Luxembourg Centre for Systems Biomedicine (LCSB) of the University of Luxembourg (UL) and the LSfM’s Vice-President.

Whether they are engaged in applied or fundamental research, form part of companies or the healthcare system, Luxembourg needs highly trained individuals with high-level expertise in microbiology. An essential part of the LSfM’s activities will therefore centre on the involvement, engagement and training of students. The society will also foster closer interactions among students in microbiology in Luxembourg and allow them better access to international scientific networks.

The overall ambition of the society is to provide a forum for interaction and exchange of knowledge and expertise in microbiology. For example the interdisciplinary expertise reflected in the society’s membership may come to bear in the case of emerging infectious diseases such as the recent outbreaks of Ebola and Zika. In general, the LSfM seeks to bring viruses, bacteria and other microbes, their concerns but essentially also their benefits, closer to the citizens of Luxembourg. It wants to become a first point of contact in for any questions involving microbiological expertise at the national level in the future.

The founding board members of the LSfM are Dr. Fay Betsou from the Integrated BioBank of Luxembourg (IBBL), Dr. Thomas Dentzer from Luxinnovation’s BioHealth Cluster, Dr. Philippe Delfosse from the Luxembourg Institute of Science and Technology, Dr. Joseph Even formerly at the LNS, Dr. Carole Devaux from the Luxembourg Institute of Health, Dr. Joël Mossong from the LNS, Dr. Emilie Muller from LCSB, Dr. Christian Penny from LIST and Prof. Dr. Paul Wilmes from LCSB/UL.

For more information, please visit the society’s website at www.microbiology.lu

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