Review Article

COOPERATIVE RESEARCH NETWORK IN PHYSIOLOGY – THAILAND

C. Pholpramool

Department of Physiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, Bangkok, Thailand

In 2001, the Ministry of University Affairs (currently merged with the Ministry of Education) initiated Cooperative Research Networks (CRN) in various disciplines including physiology. All members of the Physiological Society of Thailand as well as nonmembers, who are interested in research in physiology and related fields, are members of CRN in Physiology (CRNPS). The network is run by a committee chaired by Professor Dr. Chumpol Pholpramool. The research aim of CRNPS is focused on metabolic syndrome, and the problem on obesity is set as a priority area. During 2002-2004, CRNPS received approximately 9.6 millions Baht to support the activities of its members such as invitations of oversea experts to give lectures at meetings/workshops, attendances at international meetings, and short training courses or research work oversea. In addition, several scholarships for higher education (Ph.D. degree) both at local and oversea institutions have been given.

Key words: CRN in Physiology (CRNPS)

What is Cooperative Research Network?

Cooperative Research Network (CRN) is a research interest group in various disciplines that have been initiated since 2001 by the Ministry of University Affairs (recently merged with the Ministry of Education and now being known as the “Commission on Higher Education”, CHE). The main objectives of CRN are to strengthen research capability and to increase the number of Ph.D. academic staff in government universities. To achieve these objectives, CHE provides a nominal financial support to all CRN for 4 types of activities: 1) scholarships for both local and oversea studies up to Ph.D., 2) grants for invitation of experts to take part in scientific meetings/workshops/teachings etc., 3) fellowships to attend at scientific meetings overseas, 4) fellowships to go abroad for short training courses or research work.

Cooperative Research Network in Physiology (CRNPS) is among the first set of networks established in 2001. Professor Dr. Chaivat Toskulkao, then the chair of the Department of Physiology, Faculty of Science, Mahidol University, was appointed to chair the CRNPS. Later, Professor Dr. Chumpol Pholpramool of the same department succeeded.

How is CRNPS run?

CRNPS is opened to all physiological scientists and researchers in related fields. Thus, members of the Physiological Society of Thailand (PST) are automatically members of the network. Therefore, CRNPS works closely with PST. The CRNPS is, however, run by a Committee. The members of which are heads or chairpersons of the physiology departments in most, if not all, universities in Thailand. Assistant Professor Dr. Roongtawan Supabphol at the Faculty of Medicine, Srinakarinwirot University serves as the secretary of the committee. Important issues are discussed and decisions are made by the
committee. However, an Academic Sub-committee was formulated to help working on specific agenda. The sub-committee consists of Associate Professor Pipat Cherdrungsi (chairman), Associate Professor Dr. Suwan Theeravorapan, Associate Professor Dr. Sanya Roysommuti, Associate Professor Dr. Suthiluk Pathumraj, Assistant Professor Colonel Dr. Waree Prompetcharat, Assistant Professor Dr. Kanokwan Tiloksakulchai, Dr. Apichai Shupricha, and Associate Professor Dr. Roongtawan Supabphol (secretary).

What is the direction of CRNPS?

Since CRN is one of the national strategies to increase the strength of the country for international competitions in science and technology, all CRN must set up their research framework to fit with this goal. After several meetings and debates, CRNPS comes up with the focus on metabolic syndrome or syndrome X, the area in that many physiologists are competent. This syndrome includes the group of symptoms such as insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, obesity, and hypertension. However, obesity has been selected as the priority research problem in the early phase. More specific research topics in obesity will be identified by a series of group meeting in 2005.

What are the outputs of CRNPS?

During the fiscal years 2002 – 2004, CRNPS received the budget totaling 9.6 million Baht to support its members and its management. The latter is, however, only a small fraction of the total budget. Details of the scholarships and fellowships are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of the scholarships and fellowships supported by the CRN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scholarship (number)</th>
<th>Invitation of Experts (projects)</th>
<th>Research Training (projects)</th>
<th>Technical Training, Site Visits, Meeting (projects)</th>
<th>Budget (Baht)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local</td>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5,358,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,664,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2,576,440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>