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To :
The ESGCT president
and ESGCT board

Subject : « Candidature for ESGCT Board membership»

Dear President,

I would like to candidate to become a member of the ESGCT board. Allow me to briefly present myself. I am Els Verhoeyen and I am affiliated to the CIRI team, INSERM U1111 (ENS de Lyon) where I am in charge of a team working on the development of lentiviral vectors for in vivo gene therapy of hematopoietic cells since the past 22 years. Moreover, I am affiliated to a second lab at the C3M research center, INSERM U1065 since 2014 where I work on cancer and metabolism and CAR T cell therapies.
I am a specialist in lentiviral and virus like particle pseudotyping and have organized and co-organized several meetings and training courses on lentiviral vector development on a local, national and international level.
I obtained a tenure position at INSERM in 2006 as a scientist CR1 and have been promoted to research director in 2012. I was also a member of the jury of the INSERM commission (health and biotechnology) for 4 years since I think that it is important to represent the gene therapy field in this context. My work is focused on the optimization of LVs for transduction of T and B and hematopoietic stem cells and I achieved several major breakthroughs in the gene therapy field: 1) the engineering of lentiviral vectors pseudotyped with measles virus glycoproteins that allowed for the first time transduction of quiescent human T and B cells and HSCs; 2) development of lentiviral vectors for targeted gene transfer in vivo. For this work I was rewarded by 2 young investigator awards (from the ESGCT in 2008 and IWHUM in 2009). This resulted in several high-quality publications, six patent applications (on lentiviral vector for targeted gene transfer in vivo) which were licensed. Several invitations to international meetings (> 10 e.g. Cold Spring Harbor, French German and Spanish society of gene therapy) and by individual European labs followed.

The new measles virus and baboon retroviral gp lentiviral pseudotypes are now being used for quiescent human T and B cell and more recently for HSC transduction in many labs in the world for basic and translational research (France, Sweden, Germany, Spain, USA, Canada, Great-Brittan, Belgium, Japan, Australia etc.). I was also invited as a specialist in lentivector pseudotyping to participate to the international workgroup for gene therapy of Fanconi Anemia patients since 2010 and am recognized as a reviewer for international journals in the field of gene therapy, hematology and virology.
In the field of gene therapy, I have initiated numerous collaborations with colleagues in the field at a national and international level.
I am also president of the French Society for Gene and Cell therapy (SFTCG) since 2018. The objectives of our society are therefore to facilitate the dissemination of scientific information, to promote discussions and exchanges and to play an interface role between the various players in the field (scientists, clinicians, government authorities, regulatory agencies, associations patients, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, the public, the press, etc.). It is the task of the SFTCG to fight against fake news and provide the right and validated information, especially to the general public concerning novel therapies under development. Indeed, the SFTCG has an important role in education and informing the general public in a comprehensive and responsible way about gene and cell therapy in France and beyond through organization of special seminars and information days for the public and in particular for patients and patient associations. From 2020 we have organized two-weekly webinars treating about cell and gene therapy themes (Hemophilia, CAR T cells, neurological diseases, skin diseases and many more; see www.sftcg.fr) in order to stay in close contact with our members. Very important, the SFTCG has a strong relationship with the other European gene and cell therapy societies (Spain, Germany, The Netherlands, etc..) and in particular with the European Society of Gene and Cell Therapy (ESGCT) to discuss ethical issues and regulatory questions. In 2018 the SFTCG organized together with ESCGT the annual meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. In 2021 we co-organized with ESGCT and the others European gene and cell therapy societies the annual virtual meeting and in 2023, the SFTCG offers to assist in the organization of the ESCGT meeting in Brussels.
Since I am now active in the field of gene therapy for over 20 years, I hope that the ESGCT office will see in me an important addition to its board and I am convinced that I can greatly contribute to the society both by my expertise in the gene therapy field, experience in organizing meetings and of course the enthusiasm with which I would execute this task.

Sincerely,

Els Verhoeyen