



THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN NATIONAL CLINICAL RESEARCH

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Universities are a community of knowledge, that are capable of supplying exhaustive replies to the nation's demands for the education of qualified ruling classes and informed citizens. The specific role of the University is based on the pair education/research. A University without research simply provides educational training, while one with research contributes towards the progress and dissemination of knowledge, trains the young to use critical methods and also helps them to enter the workforce. Within the context of research, clinical research (CR) requires a discussion of its own. Its objective is the development of knowledge for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of diseases, for which not only well-equipped laboratories and suitable instruments are required, but also and more importantly, clinical support. Unfortunately, Italy is a country in which research and development (R&D) efforts are limited (only 1.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is well below the objective of the Lisbon Agenda's 3% and of the European average which is 1.94%) and has suffered heavy reductions in the last decade. In 2003 public spending in R&D was 0.54% of the GDP. In this situation, universities mainly sustain and promote basic research, with exclusively public funding, causing it to be particularly reduced both in applied and CR. This can also be implied by the reduced participation of medical researchers with regards to the total number of researchers which in recent years has also dropped (-1.9%). Considering the fact that Italy has 3.3 researchers/1000 workers compared to Europe's 5.7/1000, this ulterior drop has done nothing but aggravate the situation. What needs to be highlighted as in terms of funding sources, is that besides specific ministerial and regional funding, CR can not yet find adequate sustaining sources. In fact, today in Italy only 2.3% of clinical experimentation is funded by the university, while private companies provide 75% of funds. Recently, a new source of funding for university CR has been represented by the no profit research announcements of the AIFA. A final aspect is represented by the limited cooperation between universities and private companies, which is extremely penalising for CR. In this view, incentive measures for investments, such as tax relief for contributions, and new announcements of public/private co-funding become essential. In conclusion, research for universities is an absolutely fundamental and characterising element; research, however, requires significant human, financial and structural resources. A country that does not adequately sustain research is destined to decline, and has no future. This explains why we so often find researchers appealing to the government asking to give appropriate attention to research.