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We want to facilitate the collaboration of the public and private sector, with the objective of building synergies and growing the region's capacity and competitiveness, not just within Spain, but internationally

11.03.2019

Tags: Spain, Hub, Madrid, BioMad, Regulation, Biotech

Teresa Chavarria Gimenez, director general of planning, research and training at the Ministry of Health of the Community of Madrid, highlights her role and the BioMad initiative as they look to position Madrid on the European and global biotech map.

What is currently at the top of your priority list?

We are responsible for planning, research and training in the Community of Madrid within healthcare, and we are now asking ourselves how we should develop this healthcare system for the future. We understand we must do this in a horizontal manner and work hand-in-hand with SERMAS (Madrid Health Service). The people of Madrid have a right to universal healthcare, and it is a real challenge to adapt how we deliver this in the correct manner to them. Any changes we put in place have repercussions and it is a matter of finding the best solution for the region.

We are now looking to coordinate and form the plan for research through our local centres –universities, hospitals and research institutes – with the goal of going higher than the level of basic research and to deliver true innovation. There are many steps as part of this process, however, they all involve supporting each level of the value chain in their research endeavours, so

if an expert, be it a doctor or researcher, has an idea, we can help them harness this concept and facilitate the idea’s delivery to the market.

Furthermore, we are looking to develop the model of the health institute, an Anglo-Saxon model that with the hospital as the nucleus, builds relationships between the hospital, university and research centre. This hub of activity creates an environment of translational research, catalysing the research being done at universities to funnel into the healthcare system and have a positive impact. This will in turn benefit patients and develop the medical professionals of Madrid.

BioMad is an initiative being put in place to grow the Madrid community’s biotech industry. Could you give an overview of this concept?

The Madrid community has a strong nucleus of an excellent level of public and private organizations, with a large concentration of the commercial industry, such as pharmaceutical and medical device companies. Furthermore, the region has a huge number of private and public universities, institutes of health, foundations etc. and more and more we see the commercial industry investing in R&D within Madrid.

BioMad is an answer to all this, and really a necessity for the autonomous community of Madrid. We want to facilitate the collaboration of the public and private sector, with the objective of building synergies and growing the region’s capacity and competitiveness, not just within Spain, but internationally.

We already have world-class researchers but it is important to construct a strategy that has all facets of health working on larger projects together. This will allow everyone to work towards overcoming the healthcare challenges we face today. Moreover, we need to ensure the professionals working on this research are up to date with the growing trends in world healthcare, such as Big data and digitalisation, so Spain and Madrid can be at the forefront of innovation.

As aforementioned, BioMad is the answer to many questions in the region, but most crucially, Madrid is ready to absorb the investments that will come along with the new innovation strategy. We already have a world-class healthcare system and are European pioneers in incorporating innovative technologies such as CAR-T therapy. This will only help in attracting the investments we need to be greater players in R&D and put Madrid further on the healthcare map.

What are the next steps to put in place this BioMad concept?

It will be done in two phases, which in theory should be put in place in parallel. The first phase is to construct an association that incorporates research organizations and universities, and we already have this structure in place. The second phase is to attract the industrial sector, so we can put the connections in place to see collaboration between the public and private sector. We are speaking already with the key associations in the local sector, such as Asebio and Farmaindustria.

BioMad is not only looking to participate in innovation, but we want to construct an organised strategy that works towards set objectives. We see that many problems fall across many sectors, so we want to have a multi-sectoral approach. This will allow Madrid to focus towards solving problems that have a broader impact or will impact society in the future.

Many regions across Europe already have a name in the world of innovation. How will Madrid differentiate itself from the competition?

There are areas that have a long history in the innovative sector. In Spain, Catalonia already has stamped itself in the innovation landscape and is a pioneer. Madrid already has a name in the international scene as it is the capital, but now we must take the next step and establish the region in this innovative context.

Our vision is to be an attraction for all segments and to attract investments locally and internationally. To do this, we must transmit a feeling of confidence with the fundamental objective of not only working to find solutions for the region, but the country, and even across Europe. We must work with an international mindset, strengthening areas in which we already have a large footprint, and building competencies in other areas. We are a region that promotes synergies and collaboration, and now it is time to put this in place.

What is the future for BioMad?

In the next two years, we will already be in the expansion phase after the consolidation phase. This will involve attracting international investments and world-class researchers. Hopefully, this will all be done by 2020.

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