ESA@work – European Observatory on the Supply of Medical Radioisotopes

The 17th plenary e-meeting of the Observatory took place on 29 June.

The European Observatory on the Supply of Medical Radioisotopes aims to assess, monitor and support the EU supply of medical radioisotopes with the emphasis on the most vital Molybdenum-99/Technetium-99m (Mo-99/Tc-99m) radioisotope, used in 80% of all nuclear medicine diagnostic procedures.

Established 9 years ago, on 29 June 2012, the Observatory is co-chaired by the Euratom Supply Agency and the industry association Nuclear Medicine Europe (NMEu). Its members are also representatives of the European Commission services, international organisations and various stakeholders from Member States, industry and nuclear medicine organisations.

The June meeting of the Observatory focused on its new mission statement and Terms of Reference, Brexit/Covid-19 transport experiences and lessons learned, Mo-99 supply monitoring and the future European production chain outlook. The meeting participants addressed also the possible inclusion of other novel medical radioisotopes, e.g. Lutetium-177 (Lu-177), in the scope of the Observatory.

The updated Mission Statement of the Observatory and the new Term of references, adopted jointly by ESA and NMEu, will provide adequate governance for the challenges and the work ahead. “Transport as usual” is almost fully re-established following the difficulties brought by the pandemic and Brexit. The 2021 supply outlooks of Mo-99 provide confidence that the available irradiation capacity will be well above the need, while need for Lu-177 supply monitoring remains under observation. Research reactors and alternative suppliers presented an overview of their capacity outlook. It was expressed the need for regular updates with respect to the outlook of high assay low enrichment supply for research reactors and radioisotope production.

The representatives of DG ENER and JRC presented their work related to the supply of medical radioisotopes, with the focus on the SAMIRA initiative (Strategic Agenda for Medical, Industrial and Research Applications of nuclear and radiation technology). A call for a means to keep up to date capacity and demand of medical radioisotope was made and it was decided to dedicate an ad-hoc session to this topic. In addition, updates were provided from the NMEu, the European Association of Nuclear Medicine (EANM) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).