



Press Release: grant announcement

Nordic project aims to investigate links between mental health conditions and cardiovascular disease

Researchers from across Northern Europe have received funding to better understand the relationship between mental illness and cardiovascular disease.

The work could help predict cardiovascular risk for millions of people with mental health conditions, leading to more effective treatments directed specifically to the needs of individuals.

On average, people with mental health conditions do not live as long as those without these conditions. This is partly due to higher rates of cardiovascular disease amongst people with mental illness. This project will ask how people's genetics and lifestyles influence that relationship, and what can be done to help people with mental health conditions live longer.

Researchers led by Ole Andreassen at the University of Oslo will do this by pulling together existing resources from across Europe, including from Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Estonia, and the UK. This will give them unprecedented access to genetic information from 1.5 million people.

The researchers will also work with two commercial medical companies; AMRAMedical, based in Sweden, and HealthLytix, based in San Diego, to help predict cardiovascular risk and offer personalised treatment. This is so the research can eventually lead to changes in how doctors and other health professionals diagnose and treat people with mental illness, and prevent or manage cardiovascular disease.

The €6 million project, which is being funded by the EU's Horizon 2020 scheme, began in January 2020 and will continue until December 2023.

Lili Milani, head of the Estonian Genome Center, said "The joint project will allow us to identify people at high risk based on genetics. The sample sizes are really impressive when you sum them up." She added, "We are all part of different large international genomics consortiums, and we have worked together before, but this is the first time we have come together and proposed such a big study and got funding from the EC to carry it out."

Lead researcher Ole Andreassen said "By combining data sets, we will disentangle the intersection of lifestyle, brain-related disorders, and cardiovascular disease." This is important because "if you know your risk, you can also alter your behaviour and thus the environmental causes."

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