



Minutes for Cancer Research KI's Executive Board meeting

Tuesday March 17th, 2026, 15-17 [online](#)

(IP= information point, D=discussion point, DP=Decision point, A=Attached document)

Board members	Chair and Director Elias Arnér, Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics Co-Director Marco Gerling, Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology – CLINTEC Co-Director Anna Nilsson, Department of Women's and Children's Health Päivi Östling, Department of Oncology-Pathology, SciLifeLab Andri Papakonstantinou, Department of Oncology-Pathology Margareta Wilhelm, Department of Microbiology, Tumor and Cell Biology Matthias Löhr, Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology Keith Humphreys, Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics Ninib Baryawno, Department of Women's and Children's Health Dhifaf Serhan, Department of Laboratory medicine Theodoros Foukakis, Department of Oncology-Pathology Magnus Nilsson, Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology Eva Jolly, Karolinska Comprehensive Cancer Centre coordinator Patrik Rossi, Managing Director, Cancer Theme Karolinska University. Lise-lott Eriksson, Chair of the Blood Cancer Forum, Patient Group Sara Abu Ajamieh, PhD student representative, Department of Women's and Children's Health Liselotte Bäckdahl, Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics Stefina Milanova, Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics Pablo Martí Andrés, Department of Medical Biochemistry and Biophysics
Invited Guests	
Not present	Simon Ekman, Department of Oncology-Pathology Renske Altena, Department of Oncology-Pathology Joakim Dillner Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology, Cancer Prevention Europe. João Pedro Alves-Lopes, Department of Women's and Children's Health, Junior faculty representative Lena Sharp, RCC Stockholm-Gotland

- 1) Welcome to the EB meeting and approval of minutes from the previous CRKI Executive Board meeting 2025-02-11(A) (E. Arnér, 2 min) DP

The Board reviewed the minutes from the previous CRKI Executive Board meeting held on 11 February 2025, and the minutes were approved without amendments.

- 2) Decision Task Force Network grant (E. Arnér, 8 min) DP

Elias Arnér informed the Board that 13 Task Force Network applications were received, despite a budget planned for 10. All applications underwent external review. Reviewers identified two



submissions as clearly unsuitable due to a lack of forward-looking plans, focusing mainly on past activities rather than intended use of the funds.

A third application differed significantly in scope, which initially prompted discussion about whether to fund 11 networks instead of 10. However, several Board members underlined the importance of a clear future plan, strategic relevance, and adherence to the original commitment to fund 10 grants. The Board noted that returning networks should also present concrete plans for continued activities.

After a brief discussion, the Board agreed not to expand the number of approved grants.

The Executive Board **approved** funding for **10 Task Force Network applications**.

3) Suggestions for the strategy meeting 14 April. What is our way forward? (E. Arnér, 10 min) D

Elias Arnér noted that the recently received Advisory Board report should be integrated into the preparations for the upcoming strategy meeting.

Board members discussed the relationship between CRKI and Karolinska CCC. It was highlighted that the recent Karolinska CCC leadership meeting was heavily clinically focused, and that CRKI should further define and strengthen its role within the joint structure, ensuring a more balanced integration of clinical and research perspectives. The importance of aligning the views of clinical researchers with those of hospital leadership was also emphasised.

The Board reflected on the growing convergence between clinical activities and research, noting that representation may differ between hospital-dominated meetings and KI-dominated activities. Ensuring conditions that allow clinicians sufficient time and support to conduct research was mentioned as a key issue.

In addition, the Board agreed that strategic alignment with existing frameworks (including the national cancer strategy, KI and hospital strategies, general CRKI strategy documents, and the SAB report) should guide the upcoming discussions.

4) CRKI has been asked to be member of SweCan. (E. Arnér, 5 min) D

Elias Arnér informed the Board that *SweCan* (a government-driven initiative coordinated by Socialstyrelsen to establish a national, coordinated Cancer Mission Hub) has invited CRKI to become a formally affiliated member. KI leadership has also been contacted regarding the agreement, and discussions are ongoing with Annika Östman Wernerson and Martin Bergö to determine who should sign on KI's behalf. Further clarification is expected on how the Hospital and Karolinska CCC will formalize their participation.



Patrik Rossi noted that *SweCan* aims to strengthen national collaboration across sectors within the pentahelix model. It was suggested that CRKI's formal involvement would reinforce its position as part of a Comprehensive Cancer Center. Additional considerations were raised, included potential membership fees, the benefits of KI joining as an institution, and the fact that Socialstyrelsen may require representation from both KI and the hospital, as legally defined entities.

5) Mayo collaboration update (E. Arnér, 4 min) D

Elias Arnér reported that the PI-PI collaborative grants with Mayo Clinic have now been announced and the application period is open. Due to delays in the overall process, he proposed extending the timeline for the synergy grants to ensure proper review; Mayo agreed, and updated information is expected for the next Executive Board meeting.

Elias also noted that Sweden and the USA previously established a bilateral agreement to strengthen cancer research collaboration. Although progress slowed in recent years, a new network grant for Sweden-US cancer research was recently launched by the Swedish Research Council. CRKI and Mayo have jointly submitted a proposal, which, if successful, would support workshops and researcher exchanges between both institutions.

Patrik Rossi informed the Board that Socialstyrelsen has announced the Sweden-US Cancer Summit, scheduled for 8–10 June at Elite Carolina Tower, and encouraged members to review the programme and consider participation.

6) The 2026 CCE yearly meeting in Stockholm, joint meeting with Karolinska CCC day, 23-24 March 2026 (E. Arnér, 3 min) IP

Liselotte Bäckdahl reported that the meeting has attracted 502 registered participants, with strong representation from KI and Karolinska University Hospital, as well as approximately 100 attendees from CCE institutes, companies, sponsors and other universities. The full agenda and meeting booklet are available on the event website.

Elias Arnér noted that the scientific programme is exceptionally strong this year and highlighted that it will be combined with the presentation of the Karolinska CCC Annual Report, which will also be provided in English during the meeting.

7) Towards establishing an Education working group for Karolinska CCC led by CRKI WG2 (E. Arnér, 3 min) D

Elias Arnér noted that OECI had highlighted the lack of a structured mechanism for coordinating educational activities between KI and Karolinska University Hospital, spanning undergraduate education, PhD studies and clinical training. The Board has previously discussed the need for a joint working group to address this.



CRKI already has an education group led by Margareta Wilhelm, and this structure could be expanded to include hospital-based educational activities. Marc Gerling and Anna Nilsson have begun mapping existing initiatives and identifying key contacts at both KI and the hospital, and will report back with a proposal.

Margareta underlined that KI governs undergraduate education while the hospital's training programmes fall under Socialstyrelsen, but agreed that better coordination would be valuable. Patrik Rossi added that clinical needs should inform educational planning, and that there are opportunities for mutual alignment in both undergraduate and postgraduate training. Dhifaf Sarhan and Andri Papakonstantinou also noted opportunities to integrate clinical exchange initiatives, including within Cancer Core Europe.

The Board expressed broad support for developing a joint structure, while recognising the need to keep the group small enough to remain effective, and this topic will be included as a strategic discussion point at the upcoming strategy meeting.

8) NIO update, the renewal of our MoU (E. Arnér, 5 min) D

Elias Arnér reported that NIO (National Institute of Oncology, Budapest, Hungary) has submitted a proposal for extending the existing Memorandum of Understanding, which has been forwarded to KI and Karolinska University Hospital leadership. The legal teams are currently reviewing the document. Once approved and signed, the collaboration will continue as planned. The joint activities are partially supported by EUnetCCC and other European initiatives.

9) Karolinska Comprehensive Cancer Center update (E. Jolly, 10 min) IP

Eva Jolly thanked the Executive Board members for their participation in the recent Karolinska CCC leadership meeting, noting strong engagement, particularly from patient representatives, and valuable discussions across all thematic areas. Feedback from participants will be collected. Minutes and an activity plan will follow, and a shorter follow-up meeting is planned for November or December. The March timing aligns with KCCC's reporting on the OEI follow-up plan and ongoing improvement work.

Eva informed the Board that the National Comprehensive Cancer Center Network in Sweden has now been formally established. Although still in an early stage, this represents a significant advancement in national collaboration and supports implementation of the updated national cancer strategy. Patrik Rossi was elected as the first chair of the network's board, and Karolinska CCC will maintain permanent representation. The next meeting will take place in Skåne later this year, with potential for an annual meeting, possibly in Stockholm.

Eva also updated the Board on the Stockholm–Gotland regional initiative, which aims to formalise a network between Karolinska CCC and regional care providers. Interest from



hospitals and caregivers is high, and the Region is preparing an application for accreditation as a Comprehensive Cancer Center Network.

Patrik noted that the revised national cancer strategy places stronger emphasis on research and that input from Karolinska Institutet and Karolinska CCC will be important during the first implementation year. Elias Arnér mentioned that other Swedish cancer centers have approached CRKI/Karolinska CCC regarding forming a national research network, and more information will follow. Eva highlighted the need for stronger university involvement in emerging networks.

Eva thanked the Board for expanding the education working group's scope and noted the relevance of forthcoming OEI documentation. She also informed members that a new nurse representative will continue the work previously led by Yvonne Wengström. The SAB report has been received, offering positive feedback alongside recommendations for strengthening collaboration in certain areas.

Patrik noted that new major funding opportunities have been announced in Berlin (Charité) in cancer, ATMP and AI, underscoring the rapidly evolving landscape and the need for coordinated navigation of these initiatives.

10) Cancer Research KI organization: IP

All WG leaders, update on working group progress (3 min each, 18 min total) IP

- WG1 Research (D. Sarhan or N. Baryawno)

Ninib Baryawno reported that the recent PI Retreat was highly successful, with strong feedback regarding the venue, speakers and topics. Attendance, however, was lower than in previous years, and several registered participants did not attend. One area identified for improvement was the session on infrastructure, which did not meet expectations, in contrast to the well-received presentations on patient involvement. Planning for the Annual Retreat on 28–29 September is progressing. Four keynote speakers have been confirmed, and the next steps include identifying and inviting KI speakers. Registration will open shortly.

Dhifaf Sarhan reiterated the need to elevate the infrastructure issue to the Executive Board, given its strategic importance. Elias Arnér added that the Board had explored the possibility of visiting SciLifeLab, but capacity limitations prevent a full group visit. Instead, he noted that registration is open for the KI–SciLifeLab Symposium 2026.

- WG2 Education (M. Wilhelm)

Margareta Wilhelm reported that six FoTO courses have been finalized for the upcoming autumn term.

Regarding a possible PhD student retreat, she noted that arranging a separate event is not recommended, as FoTO already supports PhD student participation at the larger



CRKI Annual Retreat, which offers greater educational value. Alternative formats may be explored.

CRKI will again participate in the International PhD Student Conference, which this year will take place in Amsterdam. Six students have been selected to attend. KI may be asked to host the conference in 2028. The event is organized by PhD students and will require administrative and logistical support. The maximum cost covered is EUR 300 per student, and additional sponsorship will be necessary.

CRKI is also part of the InCheck research school, now recruiting its second cohort of PhD students. The organisers have asked whether CRKI could repeat the summer workshop delivered in 2024, with a potential follow-up in 2027. Discussions are ongoing, and the programme would cover the associated costs. The focus areas include innate immunity and spatial analysis in cancer and neuroinflammatory contexts.

Finally, a meeting is planned to discuss the bilateral agreement with DNKZ.

- WG3 Outreach (A. Papakonstantinou)
Andri Papakonstantinou had to leave the meeting before this update. Liselotte Bäckdahl informed the Board that preparations are ongoing for two upcoming outreach activities: the patient workshop on 23 April and “En dag för cancerforskning”.
- WG4 Precision Cancer Medicine (P. Östling)
Päivi Östling was not present. No update was provided for this meeting.
- WG5 Industrial Collaboration (S. Ekman)
Simon Ekman was not present. Stefina Milanova informed the Board that planning is underway for two upcoming seminars, one in Solna and one in Flemingsberg.
- CPE Cancer Prevention Europe (J. Dillner)
Joakim Dillner was not present. No update was provided for this meeting.

11) Cancer Research KI administration update (L. Bäckdahl, S. Milanova, P. Martí Andrés, 5 min)

The administrative team reported that there were no additional updates for this meeting.

12) Cancer Research KI Upcoming events:

- a. Joint Scientific meeting CCE annual meeting and Karolinska CCC day 2026 in Stockholm, 23-24 March 2026
- b. industry workshop - Implementing Healthcare data: From Access to Impact, 15 April, AWL café.
- c. Patient workshop “Livskvallitet när man lever med cancer” 23 April



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- d. Navigating the Regulatory Landscape at Ease: Support at KI for Ethics Applications, 12 May.
- e. Workshop with Radiumhemmets forskningsfonder 4 June.
- f. CRKI-Mayo CCC online Symposium 17 June.
- g. Djurönäset annual retreat, 28-29 September.
- h. Webinar: En dag för Cancerforskningen, 19th November

13) Any other issue?

No additional issues were raised.

14) End of meeting

The meeting ended at 16:39