



Minutes for Joint Meeting Cancer Research KI's Executive Board meeting and the Reference Group

Tuesday April 14th, 2026, 14-17 Biomedicum entrance level, Ragnar Granit

(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 Simon Ekman, Department of Oncology-Pathology Päivi Östling, Department of Oncology-Pathology, SciLifeLab 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 Magnus Nilsson, Department of Clinical Science, Intervention and Technology Patrik Rossi, Managing Director, Cancer Theme Karolinska University. Lise-lott Eriksson, Chair of the Blood Cancer Forum, Patient Group 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 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	CRKI reference group. The following members were present: Hanna Brauner , Martin Enge, Laura Baranello, Therese Andersson, Claudia Kutter, Fang Fang, Vanessa Lundin, Lars E Eriksson , Adamantia Fragkopoulou, Robert Bränstrom, Mark Clements, Juan Du, Natalie Geyer, Helene Rundqvist
Not present	Andri Papakonstantinou, Department of Oncology-Pathology Renske Altena, Department of Oncology-Pathology Theodoros Foukakis, Department of Oncology-Pathology Eva Jolly, Karolinska Comprehensive Cancer Centre coordinator Sara Abu Ajamieh, PhD student representative, Department of Women's and Children's Health Lena Sharp, RCC Stockholm-Gotland

- 1) Welcome to the joint Reference group and EB meeting and approval of minutes from the previous CRKI Executive Board meeting 2026-03-17(A) (E. Arnér, 2 min) DP

The minutes from the previous meeting were approved.

- 2) CRKI 3 year Strategy Discussion (E. Arnér, Marco Gerling, Anna Nilsson, 55 min) DP

The 3-Year Strategy Discussion is documented in a separate report circulated withing the EB.



The reference group left the meeting

3) Decision Translational Seed grant grant (E. Arnér, 15 min) DP

The Translational Seed Grants fund collaborations between basic scientists and clinical scientists addressing novel research questions. Grants cover a two-year period at slightly under one million SEK per year.

A total of 24 applications were received for this cycle, against a budgeted capacity of four grants. All applications were distributed to nine external reviewers, with each application reviewed independently by at least five of them. Reviewers scored the applications across multiple criteria and also provided individual rankings. A reviewers' meeting took place the Friday before the EB meeting to discuss the top-ranked applications in detail. Because several EB members had been involved in the application process, rankings and scores were presented anonymously.

- Two applications ranked at the top of both the mean score and mean ranking lists. The reviewers unanimously agreed these should be funded.
- For the remaining two slots, the reviewers discussed each borderline application in detail. One application with a strong average ranking (but a lower total score) and one with both a good score and a good ranking were ultimately selected with full support from the review panel.
- One application that had initially ranked well was set aside because the two co-applicants had prior publications together, which meant it did not sufficiently meet the requirement for a genuinely new collaboration.

The discussions were thorough and fair, with careful attention to scientific impact, the quality of the collaboration, and the researchers involved. It was also noted that among the four selected grants, two principal applicants are male and two are female, resulting in a balanced outcome.

A suggestion was also raised that Working Group 4 could play a more active role in upcoming Translational Seed Grant calls, specifically in the announcement and dissemination phases, while the external review process remains independent of the working group. The Board agreed this was worth exploring.

Decision: The Executive Board approved the award of four Translational Seed Grants to the applications recommended by the external review panel.

4) Update Education working group for Karolinska CCC led by CRKI WG2 (M, Gerling, Anna Nilsson & M, Wilhelm, 10 min) D

Marco Gerling, Anna Nilsson, and Margareta Wilhelm presented an update on the effort to expand CRKI's Working Group for Education (WG2) in response to a recommendation from the OEI accreditation of the Karolinska Comprehensive Cancer Center (KCCC). The accreditation



process had identified a need to better coordinate educational activities across the full cancer field — including clinically oriented education — beyond the current scope of basic and doctoral education.

The working group reported that initial conversations have been held with key stakeholders from both KI and Karolinska University Hospital, and that there is considerable enthusiasm on both sides for building something together. A 10-question survey is currently being finalized, and will shortly be distributed to those responsible for educational development at KI and the hospital.

Key observations and next steps shared by the group:

- The scope of this task is broad and requires clear boundaries before proceeding further. The survey is intended to map the landscape before defining a structure.
- It is likely that co-leadership would be appropriate, with one lead from KI and one from the hospital, reflecting both the scale of the work and the importance of joint ownership.
- Once the survey results are available, the findings and proposed structure will need to be presented to the KCCC Board, since this effort is being undertaken on its behalf.
- A decision — both at the EB level and at the KCCC Board — will be required before the end of the year. The deadline is driven by Margareta's departure from the working group leadership in January 2027.
- The practical target is to have a functioning new group in place by right after the summer, ahead of the formal year-end deadline.

5) Meeting with SFO heads Update (E. Arnér, 4 min)IP

Elias Arnér gave a brief update on the ongoing evaluation of all Swedish SFOs (Strategic Research Areas) by Vetenskapsrådet, expected to conclude by summer 2027.

In preparation for that evaluation, the chairs of KI's five SFOs met to coordinate their approach. A key issue raised, initially by the SFO for diabetes, concerns the 20% overhead that KI centrally deducts from all SFO budgets under the label of "infrastructure costs." When SFO chairs attempted to trace how these funds are used, no clear accounting was available, and the head of KI infrastructure, Karin Dahlman-Wright, confirmed she too lacked full visibility into the allocation.

In response, the SFO chairs are drafting a joint letter to the KI Faculty Board (Fakultetsnämnden) to request clarification and to open a formal dialogue on the matter. This is considered necessary in order to be able to account for fund use during the Vetenskapsrådet evaluation.

6) NIO update (L.Bäckdahl, 3 min) D

Liselotte Bäckdahl reported that the MOU with NIO has now been signed on the KI side by the Rector. The hospital side signature is still pending.



It was noted that this is a prolongation of an existing MOU rather than a new agreement. The timing is also relevant as an AI diagnostics and breast cancer workshop is taking place in Budapest the following week, and the signed document will be a useful reference there.

The political context in Hungary was briefly noted: the new government has expressed interest in expanding hospital care and education, which may open additional funding opportunities for this type of collaboration.

7) Mayo collaboration update (E. Arnér, 3 min) D

Elias Arnér updated the Board on the CRKI–Mayo Cancer Research collaboration. After repeated delays, the CRKI-Mayo Clinic CCC Annual Pilot Collaborative Grants have now been officially announced, with an application deadline of April 27. An online symposium is planned for June, where newly awarded grant recipients will be announced and previous awardees will present their projects, alongside keynote speakers.

The Synergy Grants remain unresolved. Mayo has expressed continued interest but has not yet followed through with a formal proposal. Elias noted that the slow pace may be partly related to the current political climate in the US, though this remains uncertain.

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

Patrik Rossi, on behalf of Eva Jolly, provided an update on the Karolinska CCC's positioning in relation to the updated National Cancer Strategy, published in February. The KCCC has been invited to join the collaborating group together with Socialstyrelsen and the Regional Cancer Centers, and is currently analyzing the strategy document to identify which areas the CCC network is best placed to lead. Priority areas identified for Karolinska CCC leadership include clinical research, precision medicine (starting with molecular tumor boards), hereditary cancer prevention, and the interface between pediatric and adult oncology, including long-term outcomes and rehabilitation. Karolinska CCC is large, well-resourced, and well-structured relative to the other CCCs in Sweden, and alignment across the whole network continues to require significant effort.

A preliminary progress report based on the OEI improvement plan is being prepared, and the expansion of the Education Working Group (see Item 4 for more information) is specifically flagged as one of the deliverables in that report. Precision medicine coordination was flagged as a priority, with Päivi Östling leading a working group on this.

9) 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 presented the updates on the upcoming CRKI Annual Retreat:

- (a) Keynote speakers are confirmed.



- (b) A list of KI-based speakers is being compiled, and they will be contacted shortly.
- (c) Efforts are being made to ensure a balanced representation of clinicians, following feedback from previous years. Announcements will be distributed broadly within the hospital.
- (d) New session formats are being considered, including: a session for junior faculty on applying for postdocs; a session on starting one's own lab; and a session on patient involvement in research. These are still under discussion and will be finalized at the next working group meeting.

Regarding the PI Retreat:

- (a) The February retreat was of high quality, but attendance was lower than in previous years.
- (b) The working group proposes moving the retreat to a biennial format.

Regarding the Blue Sky Grants:

- (a) All funded applications in the most recent round came from male scientists. The working group is actively revising the call text to encourage applications from underrepresented groups, specifically targeting researchers who may not see themselves as typical applicants.
- (b) A draft of the revised call will be circulated to the EB for input prior to launch.
- (c) The next Blue Sky call is scheduled to be announced on May 27, which coincides with the next EB meeting. It was agreed that the draft will be circulated for comment by email rather than waiting for the meeting.

- WG2 Education (M. Wilhelm)

This working group's update was covered under Agenda Item 4 above. See Item 12 for more information on the Fontana Call from DKFZ.

- WG3 Outreach (A. Papakonstantinou)

Pablo Martí Andrés updated the EB on the activities of the Outreach group:

- (a) A patient seminar on quality of life when living with cancer ("Livskvalitet när man lever med cancer") is taking place on April 23 in collaboration with RCC Stockholm-Gotland. Speakers include Helena Adlitzer and Peter Strang (RCC), as well as KI's Helene Rundqvist and Marco Gerling. The event will be streamed online, and the recording will be later available on CRKI's website.
- (b) The program for *En Dag för Cancerforskning* (November 19) is being finalized. All speakers are confirmed. Sofia Wistam has agreed to serve as moderator, which the group hopes will help broaden the audience.

- WG4 Precision Cancer Medicine (P. Östling)

Päivi Östling presented the updates on the PCM working group:



- (a) One Precision Cancer Medicine roundtable discussion has been held this spring with approximately 20 in-person participants and a similar number online. A second session had to be cancelled due to speaker availability but has been rescheduled. The May 21 roundtable will focus on image-guided biopsy infrastructure, which was a highly requested topic at the first session.
 - (b) The Science for Life Laboratory cluster of excellence application, led by Janne Lehtiö, was submitted by Päivi as SciLifeLab representative. Out of the 54 across the SciLifeLab cluster application, 24 were in cancer. Päivi noted that future submissions would benefit from more coordinated support to ensure cancer is represented across multiple submissions.
 - (c) The SciLifeLab Day will take place in Gothenburg, with over 40 regional stakeholders participating in a pre-meeting on digital infrastructure alignment.
- WG5 Industrial Collaboration (S. Ekman)
Simon Ekman presented the updates on the Industrial Collaboration group:
 - (a) A seminar on healthcare data handling and implementation is taking place on April 15 at KI Science Park, at 15:00.
 - (b) A follow-up seminar on collaboration with the pharmaceutical industry in cancer research, with perspectives from both companies and academic researchers, is planned for May 20 in Flemingsberg, with a focus on local/regional companies.
 - (c) The working group is revisiting its strategy to prioritize more achievable near-term goals, including company internships for researchers, entrepreneurship education, and combined positions between academia and industry. Strengthening the triangle between companies, KI, and the hospital remains a priority area for the group.
 - (d) Cancer Research Horizons (UK) is undergoing reorganization with new staff coming in, so the collaboration is in a holding pattern pending their updated focus.
- CPE Cancer Prevention Europe (J. Dillner)
Joakim Dillner presented the updates on Cancer Prevention Europe:
 - (a) The Early Career Cancer Prevention Researcher Network, with Michael Ericsson as KI's delegate, is active and has been tasked with organizing a webinar series on cancer prevention research.
 - (b) A short-term laboratory exchange program is being established, enabling early-career researchers from any of the 14 institutes to visit another member institute.
 - (c) Working Group 2 (on cancer screening) is expected to publish a European roadmap on cancer screening improvements later this year.
 - (d) A new Working Group 4 on Cancer Prevention Research Infrastructure is being established. The concept involves building a cohort of individuals at high genetic risk for cancer — identified by profiling cancer patients and recruiting relatives



with similar genetic profiles — to enable systematic prevention trials. KI, Vall d’Hebron (Spain), and Maastricht (Netherlands) are the founding members. Svetlana Lagercrantz is proposed as working group chair from the KI side.

- (e) Separately, Svetlana is being promoted to head a new section for hereditary cancer at Karolinska CCC, as part of the National Cancer Strategy framework. Karolinska CCC is currently the only CCC in Sweden with this kind of dedicated structure.
- (f) The 5th edition of the European Code Against Cancer — a comprehensive, EU Commission-commissioned review of evidence-based cancer risk factors — was published earlier this year. It is more actionable than previous editions, including structural-level recommendations for employers, policymakers, and society beyond individual behavior change.

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

The administration update covered ongoing activities:

- The working groups are the main focus of current administrative support.
- CRKI is also contributing to several EU-level CCC Unit working groups — on molecular tumor boards, research, secondary use of data, and clinical trials — each with approximately five to six active initiatives.
- An MTB Summit (two-day course) is being planned for September, in the context of the EUnetCCC project.
- CRKI, as part of the ECHoS project, is organizing the Second Cancer Mission Fair in Cyprus on the 28th of April, and ECHoS II has been granted, allowing the hospital to continue this work.

A request was raised for a shared event calendar — preferably channel-based so that Board members could subscribe and receive updates. The current approach (an internal Excel sheet) is acknowledged as insufficient given the volume of events. The administration team will work on a simplified and shareable version of the event tracker. The Board emphasized that this is a genuine priority: a clear, jointly maintained calendar would also help demonstrate the strength and breadth of CRKI's activity as an SFO.

11) Cancer Research KI Upcoming events:

- a. industry workshop - Implementing Healthcare data: From Access to Impact, 15 April, AWL café.
- b. Patient workshop "Livskvallitet när man lever med cancer" 23 April
- c. Navigating the Regulatory Landscape at Ease: Support at KI for Ethics Applications, 12 May.
- d. Workshop with Radiumhemmets forskningsfonder 4 June.
- e. CRKI-Mayo CCC online Symposium 17 June.



- f. Djurönäset annual retreat, 28-29 September.
- g. Webinar: En dag för Cancerforskningen, 19th November

12) Any other issue?

The working group for education presented a proposal from DKFZ (The German Cancer Research Center) to participate in the Fontana Collaboration Seed Fund Challenge, a new initiative for early-career researchers.

The program is designed for researchers up to six years post-dissertation, including those past the halfway point of their PhD. Participants apply individually by submitting a profile; DKFZ then facilitates a matchmaking process, pairing applicants from different institutions. The matched pairs develop a collaborative research idea during a three-day kick-off workshop in Heidelberg (all travel and accommodation costs covered by DKFZ). The best ideas are awarded seed grants of €20,000 each for one year.

The call opens May 4, with individual profiles due in early June. The proposal development phase runs until November, and the in-person kick-off workshop takes place in October.

Around 40 early-career researchers will be selected in total (50% from DKFZ, 50% international). DKFZ has allocated three grants on their side and is asking partner institutions to each commit to funding one or more grants. NKI has committed one.

The Board discussed the proposal and was broadly supportive. Key points raised:

- It is a valuable networking and development opportunity for PhD students and postdocs.
- Clinician participants would need protected research time to take part, which adds a coordination dimension from the hospital side.
- CRKI has available education budget that needs to be spent before year-end, making this a well-timed use of funds.
- Participating institutions that fund grants have some influence over the selection of their applicants, which is seen as an important condition to confirm before committing.

Decision: CRKI will commit to funding up to three grants for basic scientists and up to three grants for clinical scientists (six total), subject to receiving strong enough applications and confirmation that CRKI retains input in the selection of its funded candidates. The postdoc association should also be engaged as a channel to identify and encourage candidates.

13) End of meeting

The meeting ended at 16:45