EUCAST – the European Committee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing

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EUCAST was formed by ESCMID in 1997 to provide common European breakpoints and antimicrobial susceptibility methodology. It was restructured in 2001-2002 by ESCMID and the National Breakpoint Committees of several European countries. ESCMID has provided the administrative, financial and scientific framework for EUCAST through EU/ECDC grant support from 2004-2008, the current ECDC grant support (3 years from September 2008) and during periods without other funding.

The Steering Committee is responsible for the scientific work and direction of EUCAST and carries out the majority of the work of EUCAST. The Steering Committee consists of the central management team (Chair, Scientific Secretary and Clinical Data Co-ordinator), one representative of each of the six national antibiotic breakpoint committees in Europe and two representatives of the EUCAST General Committee. The EUCAST General Committee constitutes a European network and each European country has been invited to appoint a representative on the EUCAST General Committee, which normally meets once yearly and between meetings is consulted by the EUCAST Steering Committee on all matters of importance. EUCAST also has consultative networks of experts in the antimicrobial chemotherapy field, and representatives of the pharmaceutical industry and susceptibility device manufacturers. The consultative networks are informal interest groups and networks that are consulted by email on relevant matters. They are invited to attend the annual open meeting of EUCAST. EUCAST also consults more widely on proposals via the EUCAST website at www.eucast.org.

EUCAST has now harmonized breakpoints for all widely used existing antibacterial agents. In addition, breakpoints have been set for several new agents as part of the licensing process by the European Medicines Agency (EMEA). There is a clear need for revision of breakpoints to meet the demands of new resistance mechanisms, extended indications or new administration forms or dosages. For these reasons several breakpoints are currently being reassessed.

All European breakpoints are freely available on the EUCAST website. The website gives details of EUCAST organization, activities and guidelines, and copies of all EUCAST publications can be freely downloaded. The website links to a EUCAST website presenting MIC distributions of wild type bacteria, with epidemiological cut-off values for surveillance. This website now includes collated data from over 18’000 MIC distributions from worldwide sources.

The EUCAST subcommittee dealing with antifungal agents has set breakpoints for fluconazole and voriconazole and is currently working on several others. The subcommittee on expert rules has published extensive tables of expert rules, freely available on the EUCAST website and a computer program to apply the rules from any PC is currently being developed. The anaerobe subcommittee has advised the Steering Committee on breakpoints for anaerobes during the harmonization process.

Today, EUCAST is well established as the only pan-European antimicrobial breakpoint committee. EUCAST has united all involved in the setting of clinical breakpoints in Europe. It is accepted as the European antimicrobial breakpoint committee by the profession, by national breakpoint committees in Europe, the European Medicines Agency (EMEA), the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the pharmaceutical industry and the susceptibility testing devices industry.