

SEP Research Evaluation

Position Document

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Date April 5th, 2022

Position document SEP 2021 Princess Máxima Center for Pediatric Oncology

Introduction:

This position document relates to the SEP evaluation performed in 2021, based on previous documentation provided, including the SEP 2021 addendum. The site visit was performed on November 2-4, 2021 by an international assessment committee, supported by an independent secretary (Academion) and chaired by prof. dr. René Medema (NKI). The report has been discussed extensively with different committees within our organization. In this position document, the resulting conclusions of this exciting and stimulating activity are highlighted, focusing on the defined recommendations made by the assessment committee.

Background:

Over a decade ago a group of parents and healthcare professionals initiated the formation of a single National Dutch children's cancer center. The goal was to accelerate progress in treatment of childhood cancer by integrating care and science. The start with centralization was made in 2014 and 2016 respectively for the care and the science. In June 2018 the Princess Máxima Center for pediatric oncology was officially opened and the Dutch centralization for pediatric oncology completed. The formulated mission was and remains: to cure every child with cancer with an optimal quality of life. The Princess Máxima Center has a unique structure. The organization is owned by the presentation of the patients/parents via Vereniging Kinderkanker Nederland (VKN) and the professionals organized in Stichting KinderOncologie Nederland (SKION). We aim to uphold high quality standards throughout the whole center, and therefore we evaluate our research unit according to the Strategic Evaluation Protocol (SEP) 2021-2027. The SEP is developed by the KNAW, NWO and VSNU as the tool for universities and academic centers to evaluate their research activities in light of their own strategy and mission. This is in line with the performed self-evaluation of the Máxima over the period 2016-2019.

The SEP 2021:

The executive board of the Princess Máxima Center wants to express their gratitude to the assessment committee for the effort put into the evaluation, and the constructive recommendations formulated. It is great to see that the committee is impressed with the quality of the overall research program and the level of quality of young talents that the Center has managed to attract.

In total six recommendations have been formulated, being: - Ideal size and focused growth; - Quality of Life; - Parent and patient representation; - HR and career support; - Sensitivity trainings; - Community. These are recognized as being highly relevant and are targets for the upcoming years of the Princess Máxima Center. As such they will be positioned within the short, intermediate and long term decision making policy and strategy for the upcoming years. The formulated recommendations are to a certain level interrelated and will be discussed in that context as well.

As mentioned, parents have a crucial role, both in the initiation as well as in the oversight of the current running of the Princess Máxima Center. The VKN is one of the two main stakeholders. Together with the client council and children's advisory board, they are vital advisors in many of the decisions taken within the organization. The appeal to create a stronger support system, including a compensation model for the time and effort, has been appreciated and will be followed up. The organization as a whole would like to take this opportunity to repeat and strongly stress their thanks to the people willing to support the mission of our center, and indicated that the success of it strongly depends on this unique and highly appreciated interaction.

The forementioned information directly links to three of the other recommendations, being: Community, HR and career support, and Sensitivity trainings. The assessment committee describes

the existence of a strong community spirit and mission-oriented drive of the Máxima employees. The Princess Máxima Center is very proud that this has been identified, because it is convinced that it is one of the fundamental ingredients for the organization to reach its goals. This is especially of relevance, because of the short history of the Princess Máxima Center, with its professionals originating from various academic and research centers within the Netherlands and the world, each with their own culture. Achieving harmony and a strong sense of togetherness has been priority during the last years. This process has been more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. However, events and initiatives, such as the continuation of the (online) research seminar series, the Máxima Research Retreats and the Máxima International Community (MIC) have been instrumental to create the recognized team spirit. Thanks to all involved.

Special attention will be given to prevent that the recognized strong team spirit may avoid constructive criticism, both within our organization (including between employees) and from outside. We are convinced that a critical attitude is crucial in proper decision making to reach our mission, being dependent on various highly relevant collaborations. As such, the term 'spotless reputation' will be replaced by 'excellent reputation', to highlight the model that mistakes may be made, and can and will be discussed in an open and constructive manner.

The Princess Máxima Center strongly believes in diversity and inclusion, as proven by the existence of a defined committee for this specific topic within our institute. The conclusion of the assessment committee that the current efforts have limited reach is embraced. Special attention will be given to sensitize all employees to develop the optimal environment for all, without barriers. The gender equality plan 2021-2025, that is in development, and the internal Women in Science initiative will both be relevant in this context. Special attention will be given to strive to an equal male – female distribution throughout the whole organization.

The Princess Máxima Center recognizes the observation of the assessment committee that uncertainties exist regarding policies for contract extensions for postdocs and junior group leaders. Most mid-career researchers will not get tenure. However, the Princess Máxima Center will communicate more directly and transparently about the existing policies regarding information and guidance on career development opportunities. The in January 2022 implemented social intranet Join will be instrumental in this as well. At the same time, the existing policies will be reconsidered in view of the concerns expressed by the assessment committee. This will be done together with HR, in parallel with, as well as on top of the activated leadership-trainings. It will be discussed and communicated with the existing PhD and re-activated Postdoc platforms via regular contact moments with the research management and executive board. The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on PhD and postdoc projects will be evaluated by the research management based on the information from the responsible group leaders, in light of the appropriateness of the measures taken.

Last but not least, the topic of ideal size and focused growth, including the position of quality of life (QoL) was identified by the assessment committee. With one of the four strategic pillars of the Princess Máxima Center dedicated to QoL, it is facilitated and ensured that QoL is an integral aspect of all efforts to improve treatment and follow-up of pediatric patients with cancer. To further integrate quality of life into the existing big data infrastructure, the PROMS (patient-reported outcome measures) facility has been initiated and is currently implemented as one of the cores, with regular evaluation moments to ensure optimal impact. In addition to the use of clinical data for evaluation of care, further efforts are activated for optimal evaluation of clinical data in a dedicated and privacy-secured research environment. For this a working group has been formed with stakeholders from care, research, TDC and ICT to implement a well-functioning data provision in collaboration with the various M4C committees.

As recognized by the assessment committee, the research activities of the Princess Máxima Center have grown tremendously since the start. The Máxima has actively developed a model in which ideal size, focused growth and collaborative opportunities are optimally integrated as decision-related parameters. The two additional floors planned will provide opportunities. Based on well thought-over decision making regarding introduction of new research groups, evaluation of existing activities and priorities, in the light of current opportunities and development to reach our mission, adjustments will be made if necessary. These considerations will be made in the context of existing and to be initiated national and international collaborations.

Conclusion:

The Princess Máxima Center is proud of the accomplishments that have been achieved, thanks to all people and organizations involved, and is honored by the acknowledgement of our development and achievements by the assessment committee. The Máxima is grateful for the time, effort, and constructive feedback from the assessment committee. The recommendations of the assessment committee are found to be highly relevant and will have our attention to further develop our research strategy in the light to achieve our mission: to cure every child with cancer with an optimal quality of life.

On behalf of the Research unit,

The executive Board of the Princess Máxima Center,



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