

CoMiCProN Meeting June 4th 2024

Minutes

Minute 1. Call to order

Markus Göker called the meeting to order at 17:00 CEST.

Minute 2. Record of attendance

Present were: Henrik Christensen, Laura Filkins, Volker Fingerle, Markus Göker, Gabriele Margos, Edward R.B. Moore, Aharon Oren, Jose Vazquez-Boland. Apologies were received from Susan Butler-Wu, Stefan Emler, Alexandr Nemec, Sheila Patrick and Udo Reischl. L. Filkins and E.R.B. Moore had to leave early.

Minute 3. Minutes of 2024-04-04 meeting

The minutes of the April meeting were approved.

Minute 4. Matters Arising / Action Points from 2024-04-04 meeting

The action items from the April meeting were reviewed. Most of the action items were marked as completed. Ongoing items are listed as Matters Arising/Action Points from this meeting. M. Göker mentioned that a contact person for the German Risk Group Classification Board has been identified.

Minute 5a. Discussion: Is determining which bacteria are human pathogens an issue for the committee?

The two opposing responses were (1) that's what medical practitioners need to know and (2) the CoMicProN is dealing with bacteria for which this is already known. L. Filkins emphasized the priority of evaluating name changes. Some organisms are more important in medical practice than others. H. Christensen mentioned that the opportunistic pathogens make it difficult to draw a clear line between medically important and medically unimportant bacteria. He also noted that LPSN includes indications for known and putative pathogens. L. Filkins commented that the use of the risk group list is an option and that this may address the issue of legality. M. Göker added that a disclaimer should be used to indicate that absence from a list produced by the Committee does not mean that a bacterium is harmless. E.R.B. Moore emphasized that it was not the task of the Committee to make an assessment of the medical importance of a prokaryote. Rather, CoMiCProN aims to produce a list of changes in classification for clinically relevant bacteria. Risk group 3 is consistent between countries, but some, such as Germany, have included many more bacteria in risk group 2 than other countries. J. Vazquez-Boland added that the Committee should start with these lists, although there may be new, poorly known bacteria that are not covered. The names may not be clear. M. Göker emphasized that such cases do not have to result in a change of name. Prioritisation could be done by calculating the average risk group between countries or genera and working downwards. However, he also noted that the more comprehensive the list of recommended names, the more useful, and therefore acceptable, it became.

Minute 5b. Discussion: Do we need to calculate the medical risk of a specific name change?

The two conflicting responses were (1) this is important in deciding whether to do a name change and (2) the only complete workflow proposed so far does not need this information. L. Filkins emphasized that the practical implications of names are important, which may imply the need to calculate risks. V. Fingerle commented that the medical risk of bacteria is already known and implemented in biosafety regulations. Calculating such risks was beyond the scope of CoMiCProN. H. Christensen reiterated that new species are not on any list with risk group classifications. J. Vazquez-Boland added that new pathogens were not within the remit of the Committee. Rather, problems arise when already known species, particularly those with poorly understood medical implications, are given new names. E.R.B. Moore agreed.

Minute 5c. Discussion: Do we need to know anything about an optimal classification?

The two opposing answers were (1) that an optimal classification should be aimed for because it is the best, and (2) that this is impossible to determine and that this particular committee must take the most conservative approach that does not discard the data altogether. G. Margos mentioned that determining the best classification was beyond the scope of the Committee. J. Vazquez-Boland reiterated that the taxonomy determines the choice of names. G. Margos suggested the possibility that another committee could do the taxonomy. M. Göker emphasized that this would prevent CoMiCProN from compiling and regularly updating the list of recommended names. He also mentioned that it is well known that views on the best classification differ and that this leads to instability. In contrast, choosing the most conservative approach to taxonomy that does not discard the empirical data altogether would help to mitigate changes in bacterial nomenclature. J. Vazquez-Boland emphasized that the Committee should “take the bull by the horns” and that a reorientation of the taxonomy to be more conservative might be useful in this respect. H. Christensen mentioned the possibility of making decisions on a case-by-case basis. M. Göker emphasized that this approach, taken literally, would not help in compiling a huge list of names, let alone in keeping it up-to-date. Decisions can be made on a case-by-case basis, but if so, they should be made automatically for whole chunks of reclassifications rather than for individual names. M. Göker mentioned the example of *Mycobacterium*. A single decision not to accept the split of the genus into five genera would affect many species names at once.

Minute 5d. Discussion: Are there any name changes that medical practitioners should finally accept?

The two opposing responses were (1) that this would be asking too much, and (2) that changes should be accepted if they were kept to the necessary minimum, announced in advance, and accompanied by appropriate instructions for multipliers/amplifiers. Resistance to any change could be seen as unprofessional and tantamount to discarding the data. It was generally agreed that some changes should be accepted in the end. M. Göker criticised the term “community” for implying a uniformity that may not exist. He also claimed that the “acceptance of a name change by the community” might not mean much in the current situation where the “community” might not be aware of the existence of alternatives.

J. Vazquez-Boland mentioned the case of *Listeria monocytogenes*. M. Göker emphasized that the proposed workflow would imply immediate acceptance of a name change in case of differences in practical consequences between the two respective names. G. Margos mentioned the case of *Yersinia pestis*. M. Göker emphasized that the proposed workflow would involve the Judicial Commission if necessary.

Minute 5e. Discussion: Time for one not yet discussed example for the application of the workflow.

M. Göker presented the case of *Bacteroides vulgatus* vs. *Phocaeicola vulgatus* as proposed by S. Patrick and S. Butler-Wu via e-mail. The result of applying the proposed workflow to this situation was discussed. A description of the result should be added to the examples file.

It was briefly discussed whether an additional session would be needed to get an overview of the examples to which the workflow could be applied. M. Göker emphasized that there had been enough time to provide and analyze examples. The examples given so far already covered many potential paths of the workflow. Only one additional example had been proposed for discussion since the May interim meeting, and only one day before this meeting.

Minute 5f. Discussion: Time for another not yet discussed example for the application of the workflow.

M. Göker presented the case of *Brucella* vs. *Ochrobactrum* that was mentioned in passing during the May interim meeting. The result of applying the proposed workflow to this situation was discussed. A description of the result should be added to the examples file.

J. Vazquez-Boland mentioned the reclassification of *Mycoplasma* and other *Mycoplasmatales* as an additional example. H. Christensen mentioned *Streptococcus* species associated with endocarditis. G. Margos mentioned the case of *Rickettsia* vs. *Neorickettsia*. M. Göker briefly explained how the *Mycoplasmatales* issue would be handled in the proposed workflow. For the other two examples, details were missing. It was not clear how these situations could be used as examples for the application of the workflow.

Minute 6a. Decision on whether to adopt, in principle, a two-tier “parataxonomic” approach as described online (as yet unspecified parts are not covered by the decision).

The discussion included the question of the scope of the workflow. J. Vazquez-Boland mentioned *Halobacteria*, while H. Christensen mentioned *Lactobacillus*. M. Göker emphasized that the workflow does not define the scope of organisms to which it applies.

The term “two-tier approach” was changed to “two-step approach”, leading to a vote on “Decision on whether to adopt, in principle, a two-step ‘parataxonomic’ approach as described online (as yet unspecified parts are not covered by the decision).”

This was approved with six votes in favour, none against, and no abstentions.

Minute 6b. Decision on whether to adopt the first tier of the “parataxonomic” approach as described online (as yet unspecified parts are not covered by the decision).

This decision was postponed to the next meeting.

Minute 6c. Decision on whether to adopt the second tier of the “parataxonomic” approach as described online (as yet unspecified parts are not covered by the decision).

This decision was postponed to the next meeting.

Minute 7. If needed decisions on including additional members. Otherwise proposals for whom to contact regarding inclusion.

Not such decision were considered necessary. No proposals were put forward.

Minute 8. Any other business.

No other business was reported.

Action points

M. Göker, to add the two remaining examples to the online document.

M. Göker, to put the approved minutes of the April meeting online on Zenodo.

M. Göker and A. Oren, to organise a videoconference with NCBI staff and inform the rest of the committee.

M. Göker, to compile a first version of the list of recommended names.

H. Christensen, to check whether the journal Diagnostic Microbiology and Infectious Disease publishes compilations on nomenclature.

All members of the CoMiCProN, to check whether the remaining journals publish nomenclature compilations.

S. Butler-Wu, to try to identify the contact person for risk group classification in the USA.

S. Emler, to continue trying to identify the contact person for the Swiss risk group classification.

E.R.M. Moore, to continue trying to identify the contact person for the Swedish risk group classification.

J. Vazquez-Boland, to continue trying to identify the contact person for the UK risk group classification.