

Communication with a biobank network in times of Covid-19



INTRODUCTION

During the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany in March, the biobanks of the German Biobank Alliance (GBA) had to act quickly to ensure the biobanking of samples from COVID-19 patients and controls. However, this was countered by uncertainties, for example regarding safety aspects in the handling of these samples.

AIM

The German Biobank Node (GBN) needed to coordinate the network quickly, both in terms of the conditions for safe handling of the samples and harmonisation of the collections.

METHODS

GBN introduced weekly GBA web conferences specifically on the topic and made discussion and results accessible via various platforms.

CONCLUSION

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of research networks and has served as an important use case for GBN and the biobank network it coordinates. In recent months, many biobanks have also been able to improve their impact locally.

What possibilities could be exploited to use and expand this improved standing in the long term - both on national and European level?

RESULTS

Internal and external communication

GBN and GBA used an internal communication platform to exchange information about the status of sample collection, study protocols, SOPs etc. and to document results. In April GBN published information on the website bbmri.de to inform biobanks also outside the GBA about security regulations, funding initiatives and to inform researchers about already stored samples. GBN organised a webinar with external experts on safety regulations with more than 90 participants and made the recording available on bbmri.de.

Working with SARS-CoV-2 samples

Samples from patients infected with Covid-19 are highly contagious. The following pages detail the requirements for handling these samples, their processing and storage as well as their shipment.

- Requirements: An expert assessment must be performed of the risks involved in working with biological agents.
- Sample processing, storage and disposal: Different rules apply for the different types of samples.
- Sample provision: The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) has published information on packaging and shipment.

01 GBN-Webinar...

Webinar Umgang mit infektiösen Proben und Sicherheitshinweise

Umgang mit infektiösen Proben (BioStoffV vs. Infektionsschutzgesetz, TRBA 100, 450)

Berlin, Mienung

29.04.2020

Figures 1 and 2: GBN's website area dedicated to SARS-CoV-2 biobanking (left), recording of the GBN webinar on the handling of infectious samples (right).

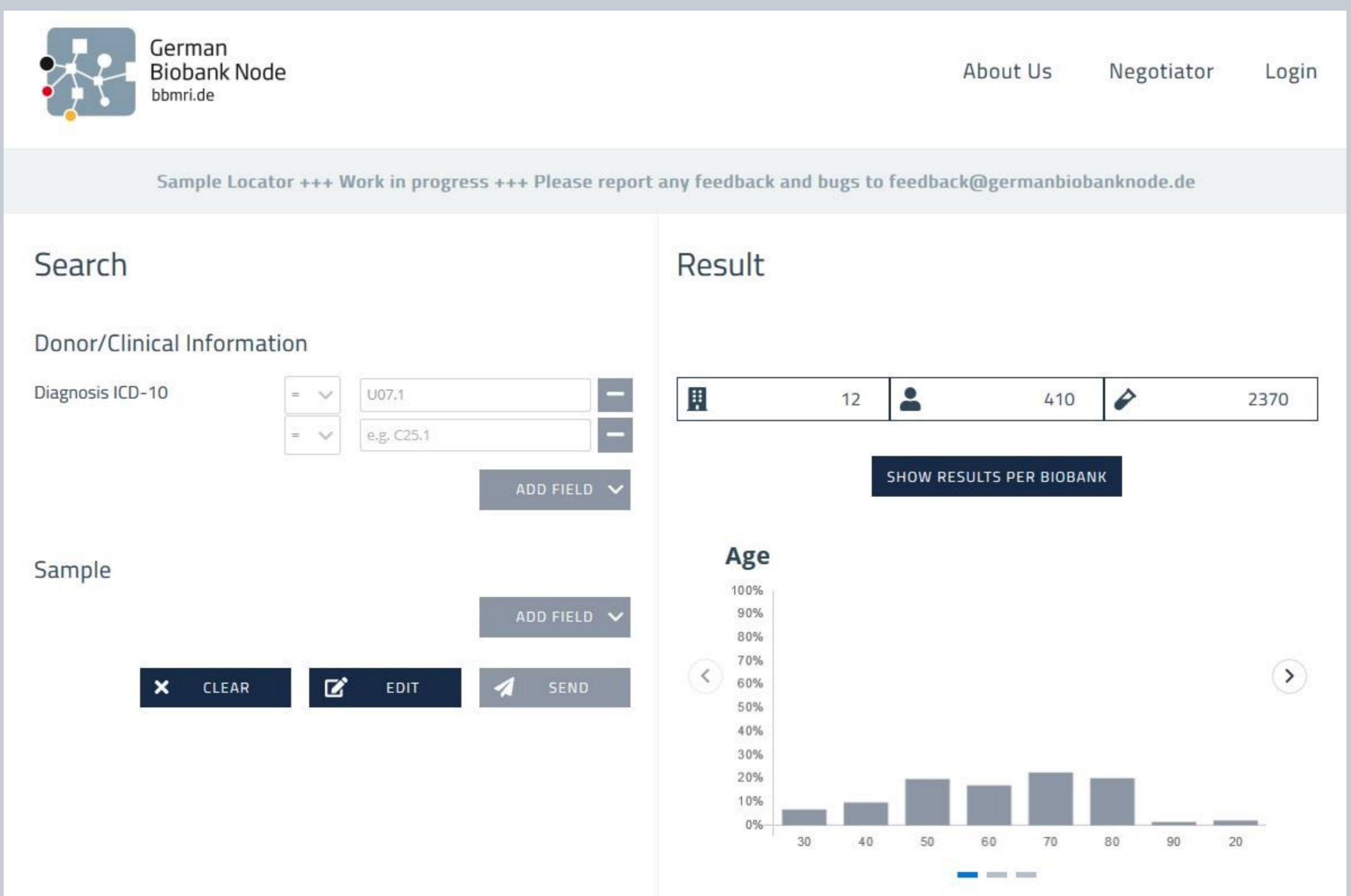
SARS-CoV-2 samples in the "Sample Locator"

GBN's coordination made it possible to quickly align study protocols between GBA partners enabling harmonised sample collection and the inclusion of samples from COVID-19 patients and controls from various biobanks in the online search tool "Sample Locator".

The National Pandemic Cohort Network (NAPKON)

The early activities described above now enable GBN and GBA to play a leading role in the National Pandemic Cohort Network (NAPKON). NAPKON is a multi-centre joint project of the Network of University Medicine (NUM) funded by the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF). NAPKON will facilitate a better understanding of the course of Covid-19 as well as research for prevention and possible therapies by bringing together clinical data, biosamples and imaging data in scientific studies.

Figure 3: The GBN Sample Locator displaying SARS-CoV-2 samples available in GBA biobanks.



REFERENCES

- bbmri.de/covid-19
- samplelocator.bbmri.de
- www.netzwerk-universitaetsmedizin.de

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