Dear colleagues,

It is a pleasure to start contributing a president’s letter to our new journal. As individual members of your national societies, you are automatically members of the EUGMS, and with the cooperation of the National Full Board members, we are beginning to make some impact on healthcare for older people in Europe. This first letter is a brief survey of some of our activities, and I welcome feedback from individual members and national societies. All developments in Europe happen because of synchrony between the advocacy of both the European and national societies, so we must work together!

1. The European Medicines Agency

A glaring deficit in ensuring an age-attuned health system for older Europeans is the lack of specialist geriatric medicine expertise in medicine licencing and drug trials for older people. It is a truism that those who consume most medicines do so in a system where the medications have not been properly evaluated for the altered pharmacology of later life. The EUGMS, in conjunction with the national societies, is promoting the concept of a Geriatric Medicine Committee (akin to the existing Paediatric Committee) in the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European agency, which oversees the licencing of medications.

We are very grateful those who have come back to us on their inputs to their national medicine agency and MEPs. Several national societies wrote to:

a) the EMA;
b) their own national medicines evaluation agency;
c) their own department of health;
d) involved MEPs – for Ireland, for example, the ISPGM did all four.

Knowing who did this nationally as well helps us in our advocacy role.

A survey of the “age-friendliness” of national medication licencing agencies will be presented at the EUGMS Congress in Dublin.

2. EUGMS Nutrition and Health in Older People Survey

One of the strategic focus areas for joint action between the EUGMS and the national societies is to advance science and practice in sarcopenia and nutrition. We undertook an electronic survey of members in national societies, and were pleased to start what we hope will be regular electronic surveys, with the agreement of national societies. This particular survey has a dual role: it is of valid scientific interest, consistent with our sarcopenia/nutrition project, but also consultancy/research is an important source of income to our society. We pledged that each Full Board representative would enrol 10–15+ geriatricians (more was allowable!) to undertake the online survey. Our final number was a total of 208, with national reply tallies as follows: Austria 6, Belgium 26, Czech Republic 9, Denmark 12, Finland 10, France 7, Germany 22, Greece 1, Iceland 4, Ireland 12, Italy 13, Lichtenstein 1, Malta 1, Netherlands 12, Norway 4, Poland 2, Spain 25, Sweden 5, Switzerland 18, United Kingdom 12. The results of the survey will be presented at the Dublin EUGMS congress www.EUGMS2010.org.

3. European Geriatric Medicine

We hope to get confirmation that the subscription process of our journal will be entirely in English by June, and then can start actively promoting through national societies. The rate for national society members will be €115 for six issues per year, fixed for 3 years. The first issue is available in electronic format, free of charge, on the publishers’ website: www.em-consulte.com/revue/eurger/1/1. The other issues will be accessible from your University library using the Science direct link. The editor of the journal, Prof Michel, requests that all Board members seek high quality papers from within their respective memberships and that these be sent to him for consideration for future issues.

4. EUGMS Sarcopenia Position paper published

Well done to Alfonso Cruz-Jentoft, Jean-Pierre Baeyens, Jürgen Bauer, Finbarr Martin, Jean-Pierre Michel, Eva Topinková, and Maurit S Vandewoude for their sterling work on this important initiative on behalf of the EUGMS. The paper is available at: http://ageing.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/afq034

5. More than 500 abstracts were submitted for the Dublin Congress

www.EUGMS2010.org. It was very encouraging for the organizing committee (and me personally) that several national societies have emailed me about their diffusion activities of the Congress newsletter. We will have a lunch for Presidents of National Societies and Full Board members at the Dublin Congress. We will also facilitate a meeting of our Palliative Care Special Interest Group.

6. Working with WHO

On behalf of the EUGMS I am delighted to report that I was involved in a meeting with the WHO in Geneva on the 3–4th June on developing age-attuned services for older people. Our Silver Paper, Sarcopenia and EU Public Service Review papers were helpful strategic and practical supports. We look forward to Dr John Beard, the Director of Ageing and the Life Course at the WHO, speaking at the Dublin Congress.
7. EU Health Forum 28–29 June, Brussels

Prof Jean-Pierre Baeyens attended this meeting on our behalf, and it is encouraging (and hopefully to some extent a sign of our advocacy and pressure!) that Commissioner Dalli laid a significant emphasis on ageing in his opening speech http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/ebs/schedule.cfm?page=2&date=06/29/2010&institution=Commission.

8. Geriatrician numbers in Europe

By the end of August, can I ask those countries which have not yet replied to Prof Kolb’s survey to fill in his questionnaire – it is quite short – please email Gerald.gerald.kolb@bonifatius-lingen.de for a further copy if you have not received it!

Kind regards, and it is encouraging to feel so much forward momentum!

D. O’Neill
Centre for Ageing, Neuroscience and the Humanities,
Trinity College Dublin, Ireland
E-mail address: doneill@tcd.ie

Received 26 may 2010
Accepted 4 June 2010
Available online 3 August 2010