EUGMS column

Fostering geriatric medicine in Europe

Dear colleagues,

If you have had the chance to visit the EUGMS website (www.eugms.org), you may have found the sentence “Fostering geriatric medicine across Europe” just below the logo of the Society. Have you ever thought about it’s meaning?

The aims of this scientific Society, founded ten years ago, include the development of geriatric medicine in the member states of the European Union as an independent speciality caring for all older people with age-related disease and to promote this discipline to the European Commission and Parliament.

Of course, this is done in a joint effort with the national geriatric societies that are members of the EUGMS and represent around 14,000 European geriatricians. Active lobbying at national and European level is being pursued, but the organisation’s endeavours will not be successful without the individual and collective work of a great number of active geriatricians.

Thus, the EUGMS decided that the promotion of education, continuing professional development, and networking were key elements for accomplishing the Society’s ambitious objectives. Scientific meetings are good instruments for education and networking, and Europe was lacking congresses of geriatric medicine, so it is hardly surprising that the EUGMS congresses are growing exponentially in quality and participation; they are now the key annual geriatric event in Europe. In fact, attendance from non-European countries is also growing, attracted by a congress model rooted in quality and academic excellence.

1. A geriatric must

The 7th Congress of the EUGMS will be held in Málaga, Spain, 28 to 30 September 2011. Last year, in the 2010 EUGMS Congress, the Irish Society decided to blend it’s annual congress with the European Congress in an excellent event that took place in Dublin. This year, the Spanish Geriatric Society (SAGG) has also had the courtesy to delay it’s annual congress (usually attended by more than 1,000 participants) from June to September, in order to organise what will probably be the biggest European geriatric medicine congress ever. The local Andalusian Geriatric Society (SAGG) will be the host in Málaga, a beautiful town located in the Costa del Sol, one of the major settlement areas of European retired persons.

Coming to this congress is a must for all European geriatricians. Most leading academic groups will be presenting their research results, and some of the best academic leaders will be speakers in a well-designed and widely focused program, already available at the congress website (www.eugms-segg2011.org). As usual, a core curriculum track where basic topics in geriatric medicine will be taught to newcomers or to those who want to get an in depth update of classic geriatric topics will be also offered. Some joint sessions with different societies that share objectives in some areas of geriatric care (ESPG, SIOGG) have been organised, and a continuing agreement with the American Geriatric Society to organise a joint session at each other’s congress (this year the AGS will host a joint symposium on sarcopenia) will allow three excellent American colleagues to discuss on inappropriate drug prescription in older patients. At the closing ceremony, some recent graduates from the European Academy of Medicine of Ageing will summarise the main points raised by all the speakers, an appealing way to end before three leaders will reflect on the past, the present and the future of our medical speciality.

Something new to this congress will be practical workshops. A wealth of workshops for pre-booked small groups is now being planned, that will allow participants to learn in a hands-on approach. How to write or review medical articles, how to perform different assessment techniques, and even some interactive clinical cases will be offered to those specially interested.

And, of course, the congress is the best forum to build relations between people coming from different countries who share common interest in research and clinical practice of the discipline.

2. Improving therapies

The theme chosen for this congress is New therapies for an ageing Europe. Older people often do not benefit from new drugs and therapies that are usually developed in younger populations with single diseases. The use of this poorly tested drugs in frail, very old individuals with comorbidities, multiple drug therapies, and complex functional, mental and socio-economic problems is raising the number of drug-related health problems, including hospital admissions, loss of function and death.

The scientific committee has built an attractive program around the use of therapies in older people. In many cases, they will be explored from a practical point of view. Delirium, one of the main geriatric syndromes, will be addressed by analysing both the pathogenesis and how multidisciplinary interventions are key in the management of both medical and surgical delirious patients. Some problems in the treatment of common cardiovascular disorders (hypertension, heart failure aortic stenosis) will be reviewed. The palliative care special interest group has set up a symposium that will try to answer to some very practical questions on the use of drugs for pain, the treatment of infections in severely demented patients, and hydration and nutrition in a palliative care context.

New aspects of treatments are important, as research for older people should also be in the front line. New therapeutic approaches (pharmacogenomics, regenerative therapies, new technologies) will be presented, and new concepts on biomarkers and treatment of early Alzheimer’s disease will be considered under the light of new concepts and definitions of the disease.

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Treatment of disease in older subjects is usually complex and multidimensional. Thus, non-drug therapies have always to be considered in therapeutic plans. Physical activity, one of the cornerstones of successful aging, will be addressed, considering its benefits in different conditions, including dementing diseases. How to prescribe exercise to individual patients, something many doctors are not very confident with, will be practically reviewed.

This is only a brief glance of an extraordinary scientific program, but a broad social programme, many poster presentations, and a friendly environment will facilitate learning, interaction and contacts. Málaga, easily accessed by low cost companies from all around Europe will also offer its many attractions to visitors: a mild Mediterranean climate, healthy food, beautiful surroundings and a wealth of ongoing activities that invite participants to extend their stay before and after the congress.

The 2011 EUGMS congress will be the largest and most prestigious congress of geriatric medicine in 2011. Will you miss it?

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