

More than Skin Deep

by **Marika Azzopardi**

I meet Professor Joseph Pace in between appointments, as he grabs time to talk to me, whilst eyeing a packed sandwich and drinking some coffee. Patients are waiting outside and he admits he is working too hard but only due to unusual circumstances. Specialised in Dermatology and Venereology, and the Foundation Chair of the Dermatology and Venereology Department at Boffa Hospital, he is presently Secretary-General of the European Academy of Dermatology & Venereology (EADV), whose appointment spans from 2004 through to 2010.

“EADV is a society that represents specialists throughout the geographical borders of Europe. Founded in 1988, its raison d’être is to promote and make widely available excellence in continuing medical education in the specialty, and to endeavour to be the foremost advocate of patients with skin disorders. It is registered in Lugano but works mainly from its headquarters in Brussels which means it is easier to lobby the EU towards better recognition of crucial problems such as the increasing skin cancer incidence including the dreaded melanoma as well as equity of care for patients within Europe both regarding quality as well as access. Although travelling to the various meetings occurs regularly, these coming weeks will be exceptional, with six times in seven weeks! EADV meetings, the annual Spring Symposium due in Istanbul this year, and several important lecturing commitments have come together with a vengeance that makes even me wonder whether it is *slightly* too much. However with the backup of our wonderful staff in Malta and Brussels, lots of hard work, and a love of the job, we appear to pull through fairly successfully and ... start planning for our Congresses in 2011 and 2012 shortly.”



At an EADV board meeting

But what does the post really involve apart from much travelling? The Academy looks into the standards of treatment and quality of care of skin disease patients within Europe as a geographical entity irrespective of EU membership. It strives to support specialists by providing regularly updated CME opportunities and guidelines of care. Our fast growing specialty has seen us move, within a very short time, from prescribing with serendipity to targeted medication resulting from huge advances in molecular biology. To this end we have two large annual academic events, one for 1,500 and one for 10,000 people. These are more successful than ever but have seen the need to go from the early DIY effort by doctors to a smoothly organised and professionally run event that is the envy of even larger Congresses outside Europe.

Apart from the Congresses, EADV also works on a very important programme entitled ‘Fostering Dermatology’. This is mostly aimed at younger specialists and is funded to a level of €500,000 annually. In addition, the Journal of EADV, its EADV news, and its web site www.eadv.org all form important cogs in the effort to keep doctors up to date.

Prof Pace believes that Dermatology Research does not stop merely at treating skin diseases but also involves studying the quality of life of patients with these diseases. Prof Pace insists that skin disease can be as disruptive to a person’s life as more serious diseases such as asthma or diabetes. In addition, most skin diseases are manifested for all to see and cannot be easily hidden away with resultant psychological effects on patients and their families.

As the founder and Honorary President of the Psoriasis Association of Malta, he is particularly keen and excited to point out the recent arrival of remarkable new psoriasis treatments (Biologic drugs), which could fulfil much-awaited hopes for psoriasis sufferers. “Unfortunately, treatment is still very expensive, costing in some cases close to €10,000 per annum per person. This sounds like plenty of money which it is, but when weighing the costs of providing this medication, the indirect costs of NOT



Lecturing in Sydney



With Prof Ann Black, Prof Martin Black and Prof Nikolai Tsankov at an international meeting

supplying it must also be underlined – society must financially sustain an adult sufferer and his family when he is obliged to quit a job, receive social security allowances, and not pay social security contributions and income tax. Furthermore, one should also consider other indirect effects such as when a spouse gives up work to look after the patient, resulting in similar financial results as above. Where scientific assessment has been carried out by respected academic institutions, the results have tended to favour supporting the expensive medication even on strict economic grounds alone!

Prof Pace has been active in public life with Past Presidency of the Medical Association of Malta, Past Presidency of the World Medical Association, and Chairman of the Foundation for Medical Services in Malta. He is Clinical Professor of Dermatology at the Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia and holds Honorary Memberships in several national Dermatological Societies. He has won the Saudi Medical Journal Gold Medal Prize for original Research, and was awarded the Certificate of Merit by the International League of Dermatological societies and the Avicenna medal by the Tunisian Medical Association for his contribution to Medicine.

At home Prof Pace is an ardent football fan of Juventus remembering with a smile his 50th Birthday when Juventus beat Ajax Amsterdam in Rome to win the European Cup and with much sadness the Heysel disaster in 1985 when he was also present.

Meeting His Majesty the King of Sweden when President of the World Medical Association

Prof Pace has promised himself that the EADV position will close his public service and that come 2010 he will dedicate himself to his patients and his family in particular his grandchildren Luisa and Sam, and his superlatively understanding wife MaryAnn. Travel with friends to so many wonderful parts of the

world not yet visited will be high on the agenda, as will learning Spanish and researching medical manuscripts of the physicians of the Order of Malta in relation to Dermatology!

At least those are the good intentions in May 2008...☐



The 4 Secretary-General of EADV to date