Challenges and Chances for Psychosomatic Medicine in Health Care: A report from the third annual scientific conference of the EAPM, Nuremberg, 2015

The Third Annual Scientific Conference of the European Association of Psychosomatic Medicine took place in the center of Europe, in Nuremberg, Germany, from July 1-4, 2015, following successful previous conferences in Sibiu, Romania in 2014, and Cambridge, UK in 2013. It was truly a “hot event”, as a heat wave hit Europe at the time of the meeting. But this did not keep away the participants!

Around 500 participants from 32 different countries registered for the conference. As expected, the majority were Germans, followed by Dutch and American participants. To our pleasure, a growing number of colleagues from Eastern European countries but also from the Far East attended the EAPM conference.

The scientific program included plenary lectures, scientific symposia, workshops, clinical courses, master classes and poster sessions. In total, 37 symposia were submitted of which 28 were accepted for the program. In addition, 7 free paper sessions were organized, which included many of the 113 free oral presentations that were submitted. Fifty of the free oral presentations were accepted as poster presentations. Overall, 111 poster presentations were submitted, of which 103, were accepted, and these were presented in two guided poster sessions during the conference.

The EAPM 2015 conference started with a joint pre-conference meeting of the Academy of Psychosomatic Medicine (APM, USA) and the EAPM on Wednesday, July 1st. A similar pre-conference meeting was held for the first time at the EAPM meeting in Cambridge in 2013, and the new tradition was continued in Nuremberg with the topic “The Art and Science of Communication in Health Care”. The pre-conference meeting was a great start to the conference with many very interesting presentations and discussions in an easygoing atmosphere. The conference was dedicated to Wayne Katon, who sadly passed away recently, and who was one of the main people responsible for the close relationship between APM and EAPM.

On the evening of the pre-conference day a very special event took place. We were able to invite around 200 participants to the historic Courtyard 600, the place where the Nuremberg Trials were held, to experience two special lectures. Prof. Joel Dimsdale from the University of California, San Diego, gave a talk entitled “The Anatomy of Malice: the Rorschachs of Nuremberg”. In his fascinating presentation, he spoke about the relationships which developed between the psychiatrist Douglas Kelley, and the psychologist Gustave Gilbert and the Nazi war criminals, who they were asked to evaluate psychologically. Joel discussed how the two experts viewed the psychological states of the war criminals (e.g. Hermann Goering and Rudolf Hess), and presented some of their Rorschach data. The second talk was given by Prof. Karl-Heinz Leven from the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, who’s title was, “The Nuremberg Medical Trial – Lessons to Learn”. In this talk, he described how the influence of the Medical Trials, had resulted in a re-evaluation of the practice of medicine and ethics in Germany, and the development of international standards for research ethics via the “Nuremberg Code”. There was a special resonance to both talks because they were delivered at the “Memorium Nuremberg Trials”, and those who were fortunate to attend, found it an evocative and moving event.

On the second conference day, Thursday July 2nd, participants were invited to take part in one of the scientific master classes, supported by the Carl Gustav Carus Foundation, or one of several available
clinical courses. The two most popular teaching updates were the master class delivered by Prof. Kroenke entitled, “Symptoms Research in Psychosomatic Medicine – Conducting Practical Clinical Trials” and the clinical course by Prof. Levenson entitled, “Update of Psychopharmacological Treatment of Medically Ill Patients”.

The main topics of the conference were:

- “New Models of Integrative and Collaborative Care” with plenary speakers Paul Summergrad (Boston, USA), Jürgen Unützer (Seattle, USA) and Roger Kathol (Minneapolis/Burnsville, USA);
- “Brain-Immune Interaction” with plenary speakers Robert Dantzer (Houston, USA) and Mary-Frances O’Connor (Tucson, USA) and
- “Internet-based Methods in Psychotherapy” with plenary speakers Manfred Beutel (Mainz, Germany) and Christine Knaevelsrud (Berlin, Germany).

After the lectures, the invited speakers received a present which provoked merriment in the presenters and the audience: a plastic sculpture of Dürer’s famous hare, produced by a Nuremberg artist for an art event, where he exhibited these plastic hares, in Nuremberg’s market place. At the end of the art event every visitor could take ‘their’ Dürer home, as did the speakers of the conference.

The plenary lectures were followed by scientific symposia and poster sessions on the main areas of research in Psychosomatic Medicine, including: Somatic Symptom Disorder, Chronic Fatigue, Chronic Pain, Psychosocial Aspects of Transplantation, Psycho-Oncology, Psycho-Cardiology, Psycho-Dermatology, Brain & Bowel, C-L in the Emergency Room, Stress Regulation, Research on Attachment, Cultural Aspects of Illness Perception, and many others. Practical workshops which were aimed to improve clinical skills and sessions of special interest groups completed the program.

For the first time, an award which has been sponsored by Francis Creed for ‘life time achievement in the field of Psychosomatic Medicine/ C-L Psychiatry’ was presented at the EAPM. The first recipient of the Alison Creed Award was Prof. Kurt Kroenke (Indiana University, Indianapolis, USA). Francis Creed introduced the award with a touching speech, honoring his deceased wife Alison, and Bernd Loewe (Hamburg, Germany) introduced and described the achievements of his mentor and personal friend, Prof. Kurt Kroenke.

Also for the first time, the EAPM young investigator award, sponsored by Elsevier was awarded to Adrian Loerbroks for his manuscript ‘Workplace bullying and depressive symptoms: A prospective study among junior physicians in Germany which was published in the Journal of Psychosomatic Research in 2014.

Finally, the European Association of Psychosomatic Medicine’s Frits Huyse Award for ‘Outstanding contribution to the development of consultation-liaison psychiatry and integrated care’, was presented to Prof. Francis Creed (Manchester, UK) by the sponsor of the award, Ulrik Malt (Oslo, Norway).

This year, the poster prizes were awarded to Ann-Christin Pfeifer (Heidelberg University, Germany) for her poster on ‘When personality impacts pain – Chronic pain and attachment style in the therapeutic treatment process’, and to Irma Bonvanie (Groningen University, The Netherlands) for her study on ‘Sexual abuse predicts functional somatic symptoms: An adolescent population study’.
A successful scientific meeting would not be complete without a social event! Participants were invited to take part in the Conference Dinner and Party in the old town hall of Nuremberg on the Friday evening of the conference. The exquisite three course meal was followed by a spectacular party in the hall of honors of the town hall. The easy going Rock’n’Roll by the band “Doc Horn & The Hornbabes” from Berlin, Germany, persuaded everyone to dance and have a good time. As a special treat, a small number of EAPM members performed their song ‘No Pain’, which lead to waves of applause.

For many participants, the success of the conference was also enhanced by the opportunity to experience Nuremberg’s present as well as past.

Next year, the EAPM conference will bring you to the far north of Europe, to Lulea, Sweden, where the meeting will take place from June 16-18, 2016. The theme will be ‘Transforming health through evidence and empathy’. See you all in Lulea!

Wolfgang Söllner

Congress president and President of the EAPM

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