



EBCOG European Board and College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology



President's Newsletter

April 2011

Well, time marches on and whilst it seems no time at all since our last Council meeting, it is less than a month to the next one, which will take place in London on 7th May. As you know, our meetings are normally held in Brussels, but in non-Congress years, our Spring/Summer Council meeting is always held in same the place as the ENTOG Exchange Programme and Meeting. This year's ENTOG Exchange Programme looks set to be a success as usual, and at the time of the last EBCOG Executive meeting, approximately 30 trainees from 18 countries had registered to take part. I would like to wish ENTOG every success for the 2011 programme.

At the last Council meeting, a lot of decisions were taken in principle, and one of these was to replace the position of Vice-President with that of President-Elect. This will require a change to the Constitution and so the formal vote on this motion will be taken at the next Council meeting. If this change is agreed, this position will come into effect at the end of my term of office, at the end of November. This of course means that we will have elections for a new President, Treasurer and President-Elect at Council in November. The elections will be slightly more formal than in the past, and candidates will be asked to submit a brief CV and present their ideas to Council on what they would propose to do during their terms of office.

In February, UEMS circulated a "Consultation Paper by DG Internal Market and Services on the Professional Qualifications Directive", issued on 7.1.11 (MARKT.D.4 (2010)). Essentially this Directive concerns patient safety. There are concerns about the mobility of specialists in Europe because some people moving abroad to practice are under-qualified. The percentage of specialists travelling abroad to work is still less than 10% because there is a lack of clarity about the comparability of professional qualifications which is further complicated by the problems involved in understanding qualifications in different languages.

We had a very limited time in which to respond, so it was impossible to consult as widely as I would have liked. However, Dr Mahmood and I prepared a swift response and I am very pleased that UEMS incorporated our views into its overall response to the paper. This really is an important Directive for our profession and I would urge you to take a look at it: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/consultations/docs/2011/professional_qualifications/consultation_paper_en.pdf I believe that it is a good opportunity for EBCOG to emphasise its work to standardise post-graduate education in Europe and ultimately, it could have significant implications for EBCOG's entire visiting and accreditation system. I am pleased that EBCOG, via UEMS, was able to respond and have, hopefully, a positive input into the development of EU policy in this area.

EBCOG, via its membership of UEMS, has of course always had links with the EU institutions. However, the EBCOG and Section Council also agreed that it was desirable for us to develop our own direct, more personal contacts with members of the European institutions. Therefore, thanks to the assistance of Senator Marleen Temmerman and our Vice-President, Dr Johan Van Wiemeersch, in January 2011, representatives of EBCOG met

with Dr Antonyia Parvanova, Ms Nessa Childers and Ms Kathleen Van Brempt, who are all members of the European Parliament Public Health Committee. This was an excellent and highly constructive meeting at which we discussed ideas about how EBCOG and the European Parliament Public Health and FEMM (the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality) Committees could best cooperate. As a first step, EBCOG was asked comment on the Non-legislative Initial Document "Reducing health inequalities in the EU."

Ms Parvanova also raised EBCOG's key points from the meeting in January during the meeting of the European Parliament Working Group on HIV/AIDS, Reproductive Health and Development (EPWG), which took place in February. An on-going initiative of the working group was to table a Written Parliamentary Question on the fight against maternal mortality in developing countries. This Working Group proposed a modification to the draft Parliamentary Question in order to include the facts supplied by EBCOG and the need for standards of care, with regard to maternal mortality within the EU. This idea was supported by the other Vice-Chairs of the EPWG and a Parliamentary Question subsequently tabled on "EU initiatives and commitment in fighting maternal mortality in developing countries, and within the Union."

In January 2012, Denmark will take over the EU Presidency, and at our meeting with the MEPs, we agreed that EBCOG should write a letter to the Danish government, asking it to address the issue of women's healthcare and in particular, maternity care and inequalities associated with that care, during its Presidency. The MEPs agreed that the European Parliament's FEMM Committee would then endorse it and support us by writing a letter of its own to the Danish Government.

EBCOG was also invited to attend an expert meeting of the EP Working group on Reproductive Health, HIV/AIDS and Development on "Maternal Mortality: The way forward" on 23 March 2011. In 2010 many initiatives were taken by the UN, the EU, the G8 and the US to reduce maternal mortality. The meeting involved representatives of different institutions and aimed to examine the role the EU and the European Parliament need to play to accelerate progress towards MDG 5. I was invited to speak about maternal mortality in the EU and beyond and I felt that the messages I presented on EBCOG's behalf were very much heard. I was very interested in an initiative that I was informed about by Senator Temmerman at this meeting, the 'Mothers' Night' initiative. This is a UN project, focusing on maternal mortality, which takes place on the evening before mother's day in eight European countries. I think this is a very interesting project which we could perhaps all help to support and promote. If you would like to know more about it, you can visit its website at: www.mothersnight.com

One of the main subjects of discussion at our initial meeting with the European Parliament in January was that of standards of care, as this is an area we are keen to see addressed at European level. It is one of EBCOG's current focuses and a Working Group, Chaired by Dr Tahir Mahmood, has now been set up to explore how some common European standards might be defined. We discussed this project with the MEPs and asked them to support us in developing European standards which can eventually be used by any medical specialty. The MEPs with whom we met felt that this issue was extremely important but by no means straightforward, because of the subsidiarity principle.

As you know, EBCOG's stated aim is to ensure the highest possible standards of healthcare for the women of Europe and their babies, both now and in the future. However, future standards depend upon high quality specialist training. As part of our goal of harmonising the standards of training and care in Europe, Council agreed that EBCOG should introduce a pilot Trainee Fellowship Programme in 2011.

Under this project, EBCOG will offer 3 three-month East – West Fellowships of €3,000 to carefully selected trainees and the Treasurer, Prof Wolfgang Holzgreve, has already factored the associated costs into our 2011 budget. A small Working Group is currently developing practical proposals for this project which it will present to Council in May, and hopefully we will soon have all the information, application forms and selection criteria available on our website.

The EBCOG site has now been completely revamped by our Webmaster, Dr Erica Werner, and has had a temporary change of address to: www.ebcog.eu . The site has different levels of access and we are still considering having a forum and including E-Learning materials which can be downloaded and used as a resource. The Chair of our Working Party on E-Learning, Prof Juha Mäkinen, is currently collecting E-Learning resources across the EU. If you use or know of any E-Learning materials, please let Juha know. Also, don't forget to keep us up to date with what your own national societies are doing and please give your colleagues our web address. As the voice of obstetrics and gynaecology in Europe, we would very much like all national society members to be aware of what we are trying to do for our specialty and, most importantly our patients, in Europe.

Another issue that EBCOG is addressing is that of Clinical Studies Groups. At the recent Executive meeting, the Chair of the Working Group on Clinical Studies, Prof Allan Templeton, raised the question of whether promoting research is in fact an appropriate route for EBCOG to take. Prof Templeton is going to look further at the desirability, and indeed feasibility, of EBCOG pursuing this matter and we will discuss it again at our next Executive meeting in September.

Council also took the decision that EBCOG should participate in the Multi-Disciplinary Joint Committee (MJC) on Sexual Medicine, which is being set up under the auspices of UEMS, via the European Board of Urology. The MJC has met several times and drafted By Laws and EBCOG, represented by Dr Rolf Kirschner and Prof Johannes Bitzer, is delighted to be involved in this initiative together with the European Board of Urology, the European Board of Psychiatry and the European Society for Sexual Medicine.

The accreditation of training programmes is one of the key areas of EBCOG's work and the Standing Committee on Hospital Recognition (SCHR) has been re-constituted to try to alleviate some of the heavy work-load of the Chair of the SCHR, Prof Juriy Wladimiroff. The aim is to encourage countries to introduce their own visiting systems and at our last Executive meeting, Prof Chiara Benedetto, our Secretary-General, was able to inform us that Italy has now introduced a national accreditation system and that a voluntary visiting system is likely to be introduced. Although still a proposal, EBCOG would be keen to discuss joining the Italian visitors to provide joint quality assessment. To date, over 90 specialist visits have been carried out and the number of joint EBCOG and Subspecialist visits is continuing to rise.

One of the issues that has become clear from the visits carried out so far is that basic training in ultrasound is often insufficient. ISUOG is reviewing the basic training programmes and the SCHR felt that ISUOG could develop a proper basic ultrasound training programme in Europe which could be monitored by EBCOG's SCHR. The Chair of the SCHR and Dr Pille Pärgrmäe met with ISUOG and I am delighted that the process of developing this programme has now begun.

As you may remember, at its last meeting, Council proposed that that Training of the Trainers (TTT) be made a compulsory part of EBCOG accreditation. The Secretary-General, Prof Chiara Benedetto, organised a TTT course in Turin in December and is organising another such course in the first part of this year. The course programme will be available on

the web site soon, so if you are interested, please contact Prof Benedetto. However, please remember to book early, as places are limited.

The Standing Committee on Training and Assessment (SCTA), Chaired by Prof Klaus Vetter, is continuing to focus on CME/CPD, Training the Trainers, surgical skills training and clinical research methodology. The SCTA is currently in the process of revising the specialist Log Book and Training Programme. These documents are available on the web site and we would welcome any comments and suggestions you might like to make.

Prof Vetter also Chairs the Scientific Committee for the European Congress in Tallinn in 2012. Progress is good and the Estonian PCO, ERP, and the Danish PCO, ICS, are working very hard to make sure everything is well prepared. The First Announcement is being finalised as I write. We also hope to have a high-profile speaker from one of the European Institutions, to give us an 'insider's guide' to current and future EU health policies and initiatives.

One of the changes we have made for the 2012 Congress is to significantly reduce all of the congress registration fees and combine this with the introduction of a fee for training and courses. This concept has worked well for other organisations and we look forward to seeing it work for EBCOG. For more information, you can visit the web site at: www.ebcog2012.com I sincerely hope you can join us in beautiful Tallinn for what we hope will be a very special Congress.

The 2010 Congress in Antwerp was successful but, unfortunately, negotiations on the financial outcome with the Belgian PCO, Semico, are still on-going. We continue to hope that the situation may yet be resolved without resorting to legal measures.

As I mentioned at the beginning, the EBCOG Council meeting will take place in London because of the ENTOG (European Network of Trainees in O & G) Exchange Programme and meeting. ENTOG works tirelessly on behalf of European trainees and I would ask you to please make sure that trainees in your country are aware of ENTOG's work. EBCOG strongly supports ENTOG and our collaboration is as close and fruitful as always. At its London meeting, ENTOG will hold elections for various posts, including that of President and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President of ENTOG, Dr Nuno Martins, for his cooperation and congratulate him on his achievements.

So, as you can see it has been a busy time for EBCOG. I would like to thank my fellow Officers, Executive Members and National Delegates for all the time, effort and support you give so freely to EBCOG. Let's continue to work together to support, harmonise and improve training, and thus standards of care, in our specialty in Europe.

Professor Peter Hornnes
President of EBCOG

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