
FROM THE EDITOR

The Congress of Vienna

I have just returned from the 11th World Congress of Psycho-oncology, which was held in the beautiful and historic city of Vienna from June 21–25, 2009, and attracted close to 800 participants from over 50 countries around the world. By every measure possible, the World Congress of Psycho-oncology in Vienna was a resounding success, in no small measure due to the extraordinary efforts of the Austrian Congress Co-Chairs Professors Elisabeth Andritsch and Hellmut Samonigg (both from the University of Graz) and their colleagues in the Austrian Society of Psycho-oncology and their local Congress Committee. The scientific program was at once extraordinarily diverse, multidisciplinary, and groundbreaking in many ways. One could not help but be impressed by the explosion of psychosocial oncology research being conducted throughout the world; at once exhilarating in its transcultural scope as well as extremely impressive in its sophistication and clinical relevance.

Vienna was an amazing setting for this particularly transitional meeting in the evolution of the International Psycho-oncology Society (IPOS). As President of IPOS, I, along with the IPOS Board and Immediate Past President Professor Luigi Grassi, have been cautiously guiding the development of the IPOS Federation of National Societies. In Vienna, we held the first meeting of Federation of National Societies, which included the initial 20 national societies that had met criteria for membership in the Federation. We hope that in the next years up to 50 national societies will have completed the membership application process and meet criteria for membership in the Federation. Currently, the Federation of National Societies represents in excess of 5,000 psycho-oncology professionals internationally, allowing IPOS to have a significant voice in

influencing psychosocial oncology care throughout the world.

In 1814, almost 200 years ago, “The Congress of Vienna” was convened in Vienna to redraw the political map of the European Continent. “The Congress of Vienna” was eventually seen as a model for the League of Nations and the United Nations due to its goal to serve as a forum for peace, cooperation, and progress. Our World Congress of Psycho-oncology in Vienna will be remembered as the beginning of a process that culminates in a truly international movement united to the advancement of psychosocial oncology care, research and education.

For me, the IPOS Vienna World Congress was intense, exciting, exhausting, unforgettable, and profoundly meaningful. The pre-conference IPOS Psychosocial Academy Workshops were held both in English and in German on June 21–22. The topics of the workshops were diverse and included Research Methods in Psychosocial Oncology, Communications Skills Training, Screening for Distress, Quality of Life Assessment, Patient Advocacy, Caring for the Caregivers and Staff, Cancer Survivorship, Building a Psycho-oncology Service, and workshops on specific psychotherapy interventions including: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Family Focused Grief Therapy, Meaning-Centered Psychotherapy, Psycho-educational Groups, Psychodrama, and others.

The scientific meeting itself had numerous highlights; too many to mention all, but here are a select few. I was honored and privileged to receive the 2009 Arthur Sutherland Award for Lifetime Achievement (a “late career award” given to me much too prematurely!). IPOS honored both Phyllis Butow Ph.D and Ruth McCorkle Ph.D with the Bernard Fox Award for Research, and Alex Mitchell M.B.B.S. and Anje Menhert Ph.D with the Hiroomi Kawano New Investigator Award. Penelope Hopwood M.D. was honored with the Noemi Fisman Award for Lifetime Clinical Excellence. The Opening Plenary session featured an astonishing tour de force lecture by Christoffer Johansen M.D., PhD, in which Dr. Johansen presented a fascinating set of data

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from the Danish Health Care System Registry and the World Health Organization (WHO) that cancer must be viewed, at least in part, as a “social disease” associated with poverty and lack of access to health care. Following upon this theme of a call for social responsibility, as an element of what it means to work in psycho-oncology, a Presidential Symposium on Psycho-oncology and Palliative Care as a Human Right was enthusiastically received. Supported by a grant from the Open Society Institute, this symposium featured human rights activists in the areas of palliative medicine and psycho-oncology: Drs. Brennan and Morrison, as well as international leaders in Psycho-oncology representing the European Union (Dr. Travado), the Middle East (Dr. Baider), and the IPOS Federation (Dr. Grassi). The Congress was also addressed by Dr. Andreas Ullrich of the WHO, supporting the efforts of IPOS to collaborate with the WHO in productive ways. There were so many magnificent symposia, plenary lectures, and paper sessions, that I cannot do justice to the excellence of the research and teaching that took place and so I invite readers to visit the IPOS website where many of the power point presentations

of the scientific program are available (www.ipos-society.org).

And of course, there were the social events and Vienna nightlife. The Gala Dinner was held in a magnificent palace. The opening and closing receptions featured the music and creative arts Vienna has always been known for. Vienna, the home of Mozart, Straus, Mahler, Klimt, Wittgenstein, Popper, Freud, and Frankl, did not disappoint as a venue for celebration. The opera, the palaces, the cafes, the Danube, all contributed to the sense of wonder, history, and the moment. For me, in the end . . . it was “the Strudel in Vienna.” By the end of our stay in Vienna, the waiters at the Café Diglas didn’t even have to ask, they just brought the apfel strudel. If I didn’t finish it I could count on Harvey or Michelle Chochinov, or the Chochinov girls Lauren and Rachel, or Alessandra or Beatriz or Shannon to clean the plate. It’s good to have close friends and colleagues who can share the science and the caring necessary to sustain ourselves in this work (and finish the strudel). Next year in Quebec City.

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