

Meeting Report 1992

The twenty-first meeting of the European Histamine Research Society (EHRS) was held in Torremolinos Málaga, Spain at the kind invitation of Dr Manuel García-Caballero. It was attended by 174 members and guests with representatives from 19 European and 4 non-European countries. The biggest European delegations came from Germany (20) and the United Kingdom (19), and Japan lead the non-Europeans with 9 delegates. The weather was extremely hot and sunny, producing a number of red faces and limbs for delegates from northern Europe. After the opening ceremony, we were treated to two excellent Geoffrey West Memorial Lectures. The first held by Professor Walter Schunack (Berlin, Germany) was entitled "Highly potent and selective ligands for histamine receptor subtypes". After a clear description of the properties of the different histamine receptors, Professor Schunack went on to discuss the work from his institute on the chemistry and pharmacology of histamine receptor agonists and antagonists. A major breakthrough, the synthesis of an H₁-agonist more potent than histamine, was described: 2-(3-bromophenyl) histamine is more active on the H₁ receptor (114% compared to histamine), is 3000 times more active on the H₁ than on the H₂ receptor and, as demonstrated in studies completed 2 days before the meeting (!), is inactive on the H₃ receptor. Remembering the names of all the compounds is sometimes difficult but I think we will not forget that ¹²⁵Iodoaminopotentidine -named by J.C. Schwarz (Paris)- has a 1000 times higher affinity to the H₂ receptor than cimetidine. Literally hundreds of combined H₁ and H₂ receptor antagonists were described, and the importance of the optical enantiomers underlined. As one of the many workers in the histamine field, who started life as a chemist and had problems synthesizing simple organic compounds, the vast array of

purified agonists/antagonists left me full of admiration. Dr Lorne Brandes (Winnipeg, Canada) held the second Geoffrey West Memorial Lecture entitled "Intracellular histamine receptors the new frontier". In an attempt to prove that people from North America are not illiterate, he began his talk in what sounded like fluent Spanish! He described novel low and high affinity binding sites for histamine in nuclear and cytoplasmic organelles, designated as H_{1c} receptors. Histamine functions as a second messenger in diverse situations such as platelet aggregation and cell proliferation. Histamine is also stored in a nuclear pool in some cell types and evidence was presented to indicate that this storage pool plays an important role in liver regeneration. He described a potentially clinically worrying finding, the ability of two antidepressants, often prescribed for cancer patients, to promote tumour growth at clinical doses. The talk fulfilled its aim and signaled a new frontier for histamine research. The day continued with a symposium on "Histamine and growth". After an excellent lunch by the side of the pool, members divided to attend the sessions entitled "Histamine in human and experimental cancer development" and "Specific aspects of histamine in cancer development" or the parallel sessions on "Histamine and receptors: experimental and clinical pharmacology" and "Histamine in physiology and pathophysiology". Certainly in the parallel sessions, the discussions were lively although some authors were unsure why they had been assigned to a particular session and many of us felt that we would have liked to have attended the other sessions. The lack of a pointer was negated by help from two well prepared speakers. Special mention should be given to the brave German delegate who understood that he had been given 3 min communication only to find that he had an oral (8 min presentation). He managed very well! The Social Programme included a guided tour of the East coast of the Costa del Sol visiting the magnificent caves of

Nerja. In the evening, after an excellent organ recital in the imposing Málaga Cathedral, many members became worried as we drove around an industrial estate. However dinner in a traditional Andalusian country house inside the "Ron Bacardi Factory" was excellent, preceded by delicious cocktails and including some wonderful local delicacies. We were entertained by a Tuna - no not a fish- but a group of students dressed in traditional costumes, who sang, played guitars and mandolins and danced.

Friday's sessions were very short but started at 8.30, one was on "Histamine and the gastrointestinal tract" the parallel session discussed "Histamine and antihistamines in anaesthesia and surgery". One delegate described "belly-shaped dose response curves", whilst another thought that Larry Lichtenstein had been publishing in 1883! Our traditional outing drove us through spectacular countryside to Granada, where we saw the new conference centre - opened in March and full of local marble and Finish Birchwood, followed by a light but alcoholic lunch! The most foolhardy of us proceeded to walk up to the Alhambra Palace- a 10min stroll which took between 15-45 min depending on the route chosen. However, the splendid architecture, gardens and pools made up for the tired feet! Our evening meal was held in La Vega de Granada (El Capricho) - again superlative food and drink followed by a variety of traditional Spanish entertainment -dancing, horse riding, the Granada Tuna and "bullfighting" with young animals (many of the UK delegates were sorry that the bulls didn't win).

Saturday started with a symposium on "Advances in basic and clinical brain histamine research" and continued with "Histamine and the central nervous system" or the parallel sessions on "Special problems in inflammation" and "Histamine in the cardiovascular system". It was a very hot day and some tempers became frayed

when the slide projection was not totally perfect. After lunch by the pool, all delegates were able to hear the sessions on "Mediators and histamine release" and "Histamine release and signal transduction". At the General Assembly we agreed to the proposed changes in National Secretaries, but there was an extensive debate on the problem of membership subscriptions. The farewell dinner was held in the Conference Hotel. The speakers in the symposia were given beautiful plates and poster prizes awarded to Kenji Tasaka (1st as usual!), RC Vollinga and R Zamfirova. We sang our anthem (the words having been hastily faxed from England earlier in the day!) and a new song by Anita Sydbom about the conference. Dancing was started off by our Secretary General and a lady delegate (who was very pleased that he knew how to tango). Thereafter, everybody continued to enjoy the evening, except for those with a 7.00 am start to visit Expo '92 in Seville. We would like to express our appreciation to Manuel and Blanca for the hard work they put into the meeting. Next year the EHRS meeting will be held in Köln, Germany from 19-22 May.

Madeleine Ennis (Belfast)

