

Meeting Report 2001

The 30th meeting of the European Histamine Research Society in May 2001 was held in Turku, which is situated on the South-western coast of Finland. This was at the kind invitation of Professor Pertti Panula. The meeting started with an informal welcoming reception in the Biocity Research Centre. This was the venue for our meeting with over 120 participants from all over the world; most European countries were represented but also there were scientists from Argentina and Australia as well as many from Japan and the United States. Some of the regular EHRS attendees could not be there and they were missed but there were a large number of new visitors to our society and they were made very welcome.

The meeting started on the Thursday with a welcome from our host Professor Pertti Panula who told us to try and make one good friend at the meeting. Then the Rector of Turku told us about the very long tradition of education at Turku, which dates back to the 13th century. Finland's first school was founded here. Two centuries later the first University in Finland was started here in Turku. He also proudly informed us that it was one of the highest funded universities in the world. We also learnt why there were two names to this town. [Turku is the Finnish name and Åbo is the Swedish one] and that Swedish was the main language at this university. Then our president, Professor Madeleine Ennis gave a welcoming address. She also explained that there were no such things as strangers, only friends you have not met yet and this was very much the theme of the meeting. Ten student bursaries had been awarded to help the younger members of our society to attend this meeting. It is hoped that student bursaries will become a regular feature of this society.

Each day started with a special lecture. The first one (the G.B. West lecture) was given by the electrophysiologist, Professor Helmut Haas from Germany. We learnt about the interrelationships of the hypothalamic histaminergic neurones with many other neurotransmitters and modulators. In fact, he likened these neurones to conductors of an orchestra. Professor Takeshi Watanabe from Japan gave the next special lecture and he summarised the differences seen in the immune system and gastrointestinal tract of mice without H₁ or H₂ receptors. The final special lecture was given by Professor Henrik Timmerman from The Netherlands. He spoke about the histamine receptors, including the recently discovered fourth type and the various chemicals that interact with them. He described how some of the classical antagonists should be reclassified as inverse agonists or neutral antagonists. He summed this lecture up as being about turning fantasies into hypotheses and then into research. In addition to these 3 special lectures, there were both oral communications and poster presentations. In total there were over 80 posters, which were on display throughout the meeting and nearly 40 oral presentations. These communications and presentations were divided into 6 sessions:

- Histaminergic mechanisms in the brain
- Histamine H3 and H4 receptors
- Histamine metabolism and polyamines
- Histamine in development and cancer
- Histamine receptors, signal transduction and drug development

- Histamine and mechanism of disease
- Mast cells, allergy and immunology

Because the luggage of our past president, Professor Piero Mannaioni was mislaid for 72 hours, he gave his communication without a tie – a first for him and the society! We learnt why dogs don't scratch ticks away and the complexity of the classification of agonists, partial agonists, neutral antagonists, partial inverse antagonists and full inverse antagonists. Later there was an interesting debate on the use (or not) of antibiotics in clinical surgery. As usual three posters of the meeting were selected for prizes and a panel of 4 judges spent a difficult time trying to decide which most were worthy since they were all of an excellent standard. The first prize went to Fitzsimons et al. (Argentina and Hungary), the second to Michelsen and Panula (Finland) and the third prize to Tanaka and Ichikawa (Japan). Additional 5 further posters were commended for their very high standard.

The G.B. West Memorial Trust, which is based at the University of East London, organise an annual essay competition for predoctoral students and the winner has to communicate their essay to an international meeting of their choice. Alison Watts of Queens University Belfast, Northern Ireland was the 2000 winner and she gave a very professional presentation on peptide induced histamine release from mast cells. Everyone agreed that this was excellent.

In the true spirit of being a European society, there were a number of papers presented which were the results of collaboration from many countries. Additionally we were invited to visit the laboratories of our host department. After the last session, we held our General Assembly and our grateful thanks were given to all the Turku people involved in making this such a wonderful meeting.

On the social side, delegates were invited to a reception given by the city of Turku in the City Hall on the Thursday evening. This was a very pleasant evening spent tasting Finnish food and drink before finishing the evening in the local taverns and bars. The following day, we were taken by ship through the archipelago to have dinner (sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline) on an island. Whilst on board, our own special pianist – Roman Khanferyan from Russia – entertained us in his usual excellent way! The final evening is traditionally for our Farewell Dinner and we were taken to the Airisto Sailing Club Pavilion, just outside Turku. Again the hospitality was excellent with plenty of wonderful Finnish food and wine. To complete the evening, we sang our anthem and Anita Sydbom had managed to write some words about this meeting to music. A wonderful way to finish an excellent meeting! Everyone agreed that this meeting had been very well organised and efficiently run by Pertti Panula, Kaj Karlstedt and all the Turku team. The science was excellent and many new friends were made.

The next meeting is at the invitation of Professor Andras Falus, of Semmelweis University, Hungary. It will be on May 22nd – 25th, 2002 in Eger, Hungary.

Gill Sturman

Friday started with a plenary I entitled 'The histamine – cytokine connection' by Dr Michael Dy, Paris Hospital Necker, France who showed us that histamine is a 21st century mediator. Then poster talks from the Metabolism and Receptor sessions were given before the coffee break. Then the third session on Immunology and Metabolism took place. After lunch

The final day of the meeting began with the plenary lecture on 'Histamine uptake by non-neuronal cells of the brain: properties and function' by Professor Zsuzsanna Huszti of the Semmelweiss Medical University, Hungary who explained the importance of histamine in the brain. This was followed by the remaining 2 poster sessions (Receptor pharmacology and Histidine Decarboxylase and Knock Out Animals). Then the final 2 oral presentation sessions on Neurobiology and Inflammation took place.

The General Assembly quickly followed this. We were very pleased to hear that our society had been certified as an international one. It was with sadness that we heard that after many years that both Professor Wolfgang Schmutzler, our treasurer and Professor Eddie Neugebauer, our representative on the editorial board of Inflammation Research were resigning. They were both thanked for their work for our society. We then heard from Professor Rob Leurs about the arrangements for our next meeting in The Netherlands. Then we were off to our Farewell Dinner with its excellent Hungarian foods and wine. We were given an excellent display of dancing; both classical and modern, with the final display being from local children who performed Irish dancing! Madeleine Ennis then presented the poster prizes. The first prize went to Self et al. (Nottingham, UK), second prize to Petersen et al. (Innsbruck, Austria) and third prize to Meier et al. (Berlin, Germany) with 2 more being highly commended (Fox et al. (Illinois, USA) and Kozna et al. (Budapest, Hungary). After the firework cake came to time to sing our anthem.

Everyone agreed that this had been an excellent meeting with outstanding organisation. Thanks were given to all the Hungarians. The next meeting will be held in Noorwijkerhout, The Netherlands between May 7th – 11th, 2003) at the kind invitation of Professor Henk Timmerman,