

Meeting Report 2005

The 34th meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was at the kind invitation of Professor Lovro Stanovnik and the Slovenian pharmacologists of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. This meeting was held from May 11th-14th, 2005 at Bled. Bled which is not far from Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, is an attractive town besides a glacial lake with a small island and at the eastern border of the Tigrav National Park. We were able to see the peaks of the Eastern Julian Alps and the Karavanke mountains from the hotel where our meeting was held. This year there were almost 100 participants representing 20 countries (from most European countries but also from North and South America and Japan). The largest contingents were from Hungary, Germany and Italy. Some of the regular EHRS attendees could not be there and they were missed but a big welcome was given to all the new visitors, who we hope will return to future meetings.

This year the meeting started informally on the Wednesday evening after registration with a "Get-Together Party" and we were each given a replica of a Stone Age flute which had been found in Slovenia about 10 years previously. There was much greeting of old and new friends and exchanging of news during the rest of the evening.

The following morning started with the Opening Ceremony where we were formally welcomed by Professor Stanovnik who referred to the previous meeting held in Bled in 1982 and organised by Professor Franc Erjavec, an Honorary Member of our society, who sadly died recently. We were welcomed by Professor Jože Trontelj, of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Arts, Professor Janex Sketelj of the Medical Faculty of Ljubljana, Professor Uroš Urleb of Lek Pharmaceuticals and the Mayor of Bled. Then our president, Professor Madeleine Ennis officially welcomed us all to the meeting before distributing the Travel Bursary certificates and cheques (each of €500) to eight of our student members. Novo Nordisk, UCB S.A. Pharma Sector and Johnson & Johnson had sponsored these bursaries and we thank them for this. Presentations of the Honorary Memberships were then awarded; Professor Madeleine Ennis gave the oration for Professor Wilfred Lorenz of Germany, Professor Emanuela Masini for Professor Piero Mannaioni of Italy and Professor Yanai for Professor Takehiko Watanabe of Japan. All three of these Honorary Members have made large contributions to histamine research and significant contributors to our society. They were each presented with a certificate beautifully written in Latin and sporting the society's seal. Then there was an invited lecture which was given by Professor Gianni Marone of Naples, Italy on 'Superallergens: a new mechanism of immunological activation of human basophils and mast cells'. After this the first symposia of the meeting took place. This was on Immunology and Inflammation and was dedicated to Professor Franc Erjavec. This symposium started with a review of the life and work of Professor Erjavec and was given by one of his colleagues, Professor Marija Čarmen-Kržan. Later during the day, there were 2 further symposia on 'Cell proliferation and Differentiation' and 'Metabolism and Kinetics'. After our evening dinner, we walked to St. Martin's church in Bled to listen to a concert given by 2 young and very talented musicians; one played the organ while the other sang. Pieces from composers such as Handel, Verdi, Saint Saens, Schubert as well as a gospel song were listened to with great delight and admiration by the audience.

Friday began with the annual G.B. West Lecture which was given this year by Professor Marija Čarmen-Kržan. She spoke about 'My journey with histamine from the cardiovascular system to the brain'. Then there was a symposium on the histamine receptors. After a coffee break there

were more poster discussions also on the 'histamine receptor' as well as 'histamine and the cardiovascular and gastrointestinal tract'. At midday we were then taken on an excursion which involved riding on a steam train through the beautiful Slovenian countryside and through the Bohinj tunnel, which was built over 100 years ago. We then walked by lakes, over streams, clambering along narrow paths to experience some of the breathtaking scenery in this part of Europe. We also visited the Korarid Museum which had exhibits about the events of the first World War that took place on the Isonzo Front and in particular the Battle of Kobraid. To finish the evening we had a meal in a local restaurant. A truly wonderful but exhausting time was had by all.

At the start of the final day, a plenary lecture entitled "The Role of Mast Cells in Allergic Diseases and Innate Immunity" was given by Michael Beaven, USA. Then we had the final symposium of the meeting on the nervous system and the poster session on the nervous system was held after the coffee break. Throughout this meeting, nearly 50 posters were on display and the poster-judging panel had a difficult job in deciding the best ones. Eventually they awarded first prize to Metoda Lipnik-Stangelj and Marija Čarmen-Kržan (Ljubljana, Slovenia), second prize to Erna Pap et al. (Budapest, Hungary and Fulda, Germany) and third prize to Simona Rajtar et al. (Ljubljana, Slovenia and Innsbruck, Austria), with a highly commended award going to Peter Pocza et al. (Budapest, Hungary). After lunch we listened to the finalists give their presentations for the Young Investigator Award, which was sponsored by Abbott Laboratories. These awards were for pre-doctoral students and post-doctoral trainees with no more than 3 years research training. Competitors had to submit a manuscript of their work several weeks prior to the meeting and these were peer reviewed. A total of four finalists had to give a 10-minute oral presentation which was then discussed. The winner (Zoltan Pos of Budapest, Hungary) and runner-up (Cong Yu Jin of Turku, Finland) received a cash prize. A special commendation was awarded to Iven Jelinek of Budapest, Hungary) and Vanina Medina of Buenos Aires, Argentina). All the finalists received a certificate and a present.

To end the formal part of our meeting, there was the General Assembly. In addition to the usual business, there was the unanimous acceptance for Börje Uvnäs' wife, Ingrid to be made an Honorary Member at our meeting next May. She has been a loyal supporter of the society over many, many years. Our meeting ended with its traditional Farewell Dinner. During this dinner we saw traditional Slovenian folk dances. They performed dances and songs from the Poljanska valley and from Rezija. As usual we had our singing session – 'Clementine' to new words composed by Anita Sydbom thanking our Slovenian hosts for an excellent meeting then our EHRS anthem.

Everyone agreed that this had been an excellent scientific meeting with superb organisation. Thanks were given to the Slovenian pharmacologists. The next meeting will be held in Greece, at Delphi (May 10th – 13th, 2006) at the kind invitation of the Greek histaminologists.

Gill Sturman