

Meeting Report 2007

The 36th meeting of the European Histamine Research Society was at the kind invitation of Professor Emanuela Masini and the Italian pharmacologists of the University of Florence, Italy. This meeting was held, May 9th – 12th, 2007 in Florence and was to pay tribute to one of our Honorary Members; Pier Francesco Mannaioni, a past president of our society who had earlier this year retired from being head of the Department of Preclinical and Clinical Pharmacology at the University of Florence. This was the third time that our society has held its meetings in Florence; first in 1975 and then in 1984. This year there were about 182 participants (151 scientists plus 31 accompanying persons) registered, representing 23 countries (most from European countries but also from North and South America and Japan). The largest contingents, besides the Italians, were from the UK, Hungary and Germany. 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 formally on the Wednesday with the Opening Ceremony in the Palazzo Vecchio. We were welcomed by Professors Ricca and Gensini of the University of Florence, Professor Emanuela Masini, our hostess and Anita Sydbom, our new President. They all talked about this meeting and paid tribute to Piero Mannaioni. Then there was a short presentation by Cristina Acidini, the Florentine Minister of Art and Culture who showed us a film of some of the wonderful art works in the Uffizi Gallery for which Florence is so famous. After this ceremony there was a buffet while we greeted old and new friends and exchanging of news during the rest of the evening but also were able to marvel at the frescos both above and besides us in the Palazzo Vecchio.

The meeting was held in the Maglio Cloister, which had been a convent for Dominican Nuns, but is now used by the Italian Army as their Medical School/Headquarters. On the Thursday morning, there was the Opening Session where we were formally welcomed by Professor Masini who thanked Brigadier General Antonio Santoro for the use of this venue. Our president, Anita Sydbom officially welcomed us all to the meeting before distributing the Travel Bursary certificates and cheques (each of €500) to 13 of our student members. Novo Nordisk, UCB S.A. Pharma Sector, Johnson & Johnson, Glaxo, Roche as well as the G.B. West Memorial Trust had sponsored these bursaries and we thank them for this. The three Honorary Memberships were then awarded; Professor Sir James Black gave the oration for Professor Robin Gannellin of the UK, Professor Holger Stark for Professor Walter Schunack, Germany and Professor Rob Leurs for Professor Henk Timmerman of The Netherlands. All three of these Honorary Members have made significant contributions to our research by synthesising many novel histaminergic compounds for us. They were each presented with a certificate beautifully written in Latin and sporting the society's seal. Then there was the G.B. West lecture which was introduced by Professor Helmut Haas of Dusseldorf and given by Professor Rob Leurs of Amsterdam. The lecture was entitled 'And then there were four.....' After this were two symposia on 'Histamine Receptors' and 'Histamine and the Immune System'. Two poster sessions were held in the cloisters and the 26 posters were discussed by the participants.

Friday began with an invited lecture which was given this year by Professor Angelo Parini of Toulouse, France. He spoke about 'Oxidative stress and monoamine oxidase; from basic studies to novel therapeutic interventions'. Then there was a symposium on the physiological and pharmacological role of monoamine oxidases before more poster discussions. These were followed

by a symposium dedicated to Professor Piero Mannaioni on 'Histamine: a mediator for all seasons'. After lunch, we were then taken on a coach excursion to the medieval walled city of Siena. Unfortunately there was only a limited time to take in some of the wonderful sites here. To finish the evening we were then driven through the Chianti countryside to the Fattoria di Montepaldi where we had a meal under the stars. Here we were able to listen to a local folk group singing many bygone Tuscan songs – a truly wonderful end to a lovely day. Professors Masini and Mannaioni joined in the singing with gusto! Sadly en route to the coach to go to Siena one of our members hurt her foot badly and the foot was covered with ice for the rest of the day. However, throughout the dinner, various medically and non-medically qualified members came to 'look at the foot'. The next day, although it required a plaster cast, we were pleased to find out that it was not broken.

At the start of the final day, a plenary lecture entitled 'Anaphylaxis: pathophysiology and management' was given by Johannes Ring of München, Germany. Then we listened to five finalists give their presentations for the Art A. Hancock Young Investigator Award, which was sponsored by Abbott Laboratories and Art's widow, Kathryn. These awards are 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 five finalists had to give a 10-minute oral presentation which was then discussed. The winner (Regis Parmentier of Lyon, France) and the runner-up (Lucia Giannini of Florence, Italy) received a cash prize. A special commendation was awarded to Dorothea Dijkstra (Hannover, Germany), Zsuzsanna Horvath (Budapest, Hungary) and Fiona Shenton (Durham, UK). All these finalists received a certificate and a present. Then the final symposia took place; one on 'Histamine; cell growth and differentiation' and the other on 'Histamine and diseases'. 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 Judith Ramos-Jiménez et al. of Mexico, second prize to David Vandael et al. (Dusseldorf, Germany) and joint third prizes to Gianni Garcia-Faroldi et al. (Málaga, Spain) with highly commended awards going to Špela Sprogar et al. (Ljubljana, Slovenia), A.Molina-Hernández et al. (Mexico) and Elisa Benetti et al. (Turin, Italy). To end the formal part of our meeting, there was the General Assembly.

Our meeting ended with its traditional Farewell Dinner in the spectacular Palazzo Borghese. During this dinner, we saw a display of some Tuscan flag throwing and waving before eating a wonderful Italian banquet. As usual we had our singing session – 'Clementine' to new words composed by Anita Sydbom thanking our Italian hosts, especially Emanuela for an excellent meeting and then we sung our EHRS anthem.

Everyone agreed that this had been an excellent scientific meeting with superb organisation. Thanks were given to the Italian pharmacologists. The next meeting will be held near Stockholm, Sweden (May 7th – 10th, 2008) at the kind invitation of our president, Anita Sydbom and the Centre for Allergy Research at the Karolinska Institutet.

Gill Sturman