

Message from the President

Giovanni Viegi, ERS President



Spring is now officially upon us and for the ERS, and respiratory medicine in general, this year's spring has brought many new initiatives which I enjoyed participating in.

On March 13-14, 2006 in Trieste, an Italian congress hosted the 1st Mittel-European Conference on Pneumology. This one-day session in English, with participants from surrounding countries, was an international experiment. It was an example of regional collaboration, fostered by our Society, in which national societies or local groups of clinicians and scientists convened to debate theoretical and practical issues of common interest in a specific geographical area.

On March 16-17, 2006 in Brussels, a historical event for the ERS took place, the kick-off meeting of GRACE (see page 7), an EU-funded network of excellence made up of top class European academic and research institutions in order to combat antibiotic resistance. For the first time, the ERS is officially participating in a large EU-funded initiative by sharing the educational work-package with the European Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID). The two societies will organise a series of postgraduate courses and workshops which will begin at the ERS Congress in Munich.

Again in Brussels on March 21, at

the European Parliament, the Smoke Free Partnership, which the ERS belongs to, launched an important report on passive smoking "Lifting the smokescreen: 10 reasons for a smoke free Europe". It indicates that second-hand smoke is responsible for nearly 80,000 deaths per year and is a huge burden in terms of respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms/diseases in Europe (see page 4). I do believe that such an initiative can contribute greatly to the spread of the culture needed to foster the introduction of a smoking ban in public places throughout the whole of Europe. The news from the Turkish Parliament, at the end of March, was very encouraging as the introduction of a smoking ban was supported.

On March 24, in Taormina, the ERS Steering Committee held a one-day session devoted to the strategy of the Society for the next five years. Replies to a pre-circulated questionnaire among the current and previous officers were discussed, along with excellent slide presentations made by the managers of all the ERS departments. In the following months the discussion will continue and the individual Assembly business meetings, in Munich, will be another important occasion. It is essential that we all keep working in order to maintain and expand the success experienced by our Society in the last 16 years.

The official launch of the Global Alliance against chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) took place in Beijing on March 29. It is a partnership of the World Health Organization (WHO) and more than 40 international and national medical organisations that are active in the fields of respirology, allergology, paediatrics and general practice. There are also patient associations as well as some governmental organisations. The main aims of GARD are to increase awareness and advocacy on chronic respiratory and allergic diseases, as well as to help collect epidemiological and economic data on disease burden and to help form a standardised approach to diagnosis and management which can be applied, especially in developing countries. It is not merely a coincidence that during the last two preparatory years of GARD, WHO has started defining respiratory diseases as a "main disease", in its recent reports. The ERS is very involved in such an alliance through the participation of, among others, the President, the Past-President and one of the Editors-in-Chief (Klaus Rabe) of the *ERJ*. I do hope that, after WHO, the European Commission fully understands the top priority of devolving interest and resources to combat such diffuse and severe diseases.

Giovanni Viegi
ERS President

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