

Third Systemic Sclerosis World Congress

Rome, February 6–8, 2014

The Third Systemic Sclerosis World Congress was organized in Rome on February 6–8, 2014 and followed the previous meetings in Florence and Madrid. The Congress was organized by the World Scleroderma Foundation in collaboration with Societa Italiana di Reumatologia. A significant effort to organize the meeting was done by the European Scleroderma Trial and Research Group (EUSTAR). The following rheumatologists were the Honorary Presidents of the Congress: Carol Black (United Kingdom), Stefania Jabłońska (Poland), Frank Wollheim (Sweden) and Thomas Medsger (USA). The Organizing Committee consisted of Daniel E. Furst, Marco Matucci-Cerinic, Alan Tyndall, Ulf Müller-Ladner, Louis Guillevin, Kazuhiko Takehara, James R. Seibold. Professor Otylia Kowal-Bielecka from Poland was a member of the Scientific Committee. Co-organizer of the congress was the Federation of European Scleroderma Associations (FESCA) with its president, Ann Tyrrell Kennedy.

The Third Systemic Sclerosis World Congress took place in Hotel Egrife Palace in Rome and was attended by more than 1200 participants from 50 countries.

During the Opening Ceremony of the Congress participants were welcomed by Marco Matucci-Cerinic, a long-lasting *spiritus movens* of the scleroderma movement in the world and Daniel E. Furst, one of the leading researchers in the field of this enigmatic disease. The first address was delivered by Alexandre Klee, honorary patron of the World Scleroderma Foundation, a grandson of Paul Klee, a famous painter from Switzerland. Paul Klee died due to systemic sclerosis. Alexander Klee discussed the impact of scleroderma on a creative genius. Welcome address on behalf of the patients' association was delivered by Ann Tyrrell Kennedy, the president of the FESCA.

The first plenary session was chaired by Frank Wollheim, and was composed of two lectures summarizing the achievements in clinical investigations of systemic sclerosis (Marco Matucci-Cerinic) and basic medical science studies (John Varga).

Working sessions of the congress were focused on a number of aspects of the disease, including: assessment and treatment of early detected systemic sclerosis, differential diagnostics, role of glucocorticoids in treatment of scleroderma patients, gastrointestinal involvement, relationship between inflammatory, immunologic and vascular abnormalities in systemic sclerosis, new biological therapies, application of the disease-modified drugs in management of systemic sclerosis, pathomechanism of fibrosis, interstitial lung disease and pulmonary hypertension.

Workshops with practical training took place during the congress. The main topics were: evaluation of skin score, evaluation of fibrosis with high-resolution computed tomography, autoantibodies in children, capillaroscopy, and limited scleroderma.

The poster session was very large. There were also posters from Poland, for example: "Circulating angiogenic factors in systemic sclerosis patients – association with clinical manifestations" (M. Madej, A. Łuczak, B. Nowak, E. Morgiel, L. Korman, P. Wiland), "Circulating endothelial microparticles reflect microvascular impairment in patients with systemic sclerosis" (O. Kowal-Bielecka, M. Bielecki, M. Michalska-Jakubus, D. Krasowska), "Anti-CCP antibodies and rheumatoid factor in systemic sclerosis-prevalence and usefulness" (E. Wielosz, M. Dryglewska, M. Majdan), "Serum growth differentiation factor 15 and transforming growth factor beta 1 in patients with systemic sclerosis"



Photo 1. Group of the Congress participants from Poland with Thomas Medsger.

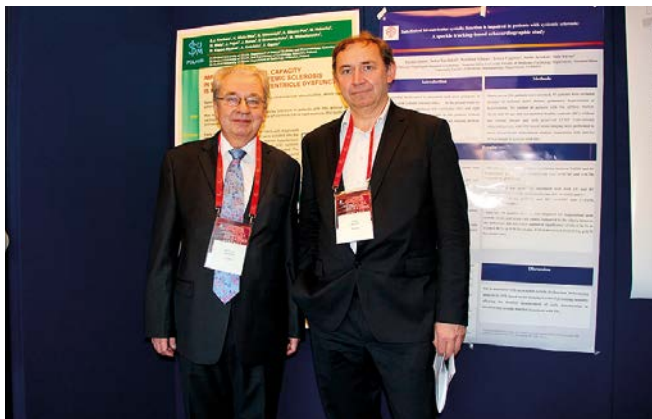


Photo 2. Eugeniusz J. Kucharz and Piotr Wiland during the poster session.

(E.J. Kucharz, K. Gieszczyk, A. Sikora-Puz, M. Mizia, M. Widuchowska, A. Kotulska, M. Kopeć-Mędrek, J. Chudek, K. Mizia-Stec), “Impaired functional capacity in patients with systemic sclerosis is related to the right ventricle dysfunction” (E.J. Kucharz, K. Mizia-Stec, K. Gieszczyk, A. Sikora-Puz, M. Haberka, M. Mizia, J. Pająk, J. Baron, K. Gruszczyńska, M. Widuchowska, M. Kopeć-Mędrek, A. Kotulska, Z. Gąsior), The last paper was accepted for so-called poster tour session.

In the last day of the congress, the business meeting of the EUSTAR Group took place. Several aspects were discussed, including the financial situation, acquisition of new funding, cooperation

with the World Scleroderma Foundation as well as organization of the next (2015) Educational Course of Systemic Sclerosis. Three countries had applied, Croatia, Egypt and Poland. The final decision was favorite to Poland and the EUSTAR Educational Course 2015 will take place in Katowice on February 2015.

Systemic sclerosis is a very mysterious disease. Despite its enigmatic nature we can conclude some advances in diagnostics (introduction of the term „very early systemic sclerosis) as well as in management (e.g. organ-specific therapy, autologous stem cell transplantation). In concluding remarks of the Congress the real progress was mentioned despite lack of understanding of the disease pathomechanism and efficient therapy. It is worth mentioning that autologous stem cell transplantations are carried out in Poland at the Department of Internal Medicine and Rheumatology of the Medical University of Silesia in Katowice and this medication is available for a few last years. The preliminary results of the Autologous Stem Cell Transplantation International Scleroderma (ASTIS) study were presented. They revealed that mortality is slightly higher during the first 2–3 years after transplantation as compared with cyclophosphamide medication but later the survival and organ involvement in the patients are significantly better than in those receiving traditional pharmacotherapy.

New clinical trials on cyclophosphamide were announced during the Congress as well as a number of possible mechanism of the fibrosis development were reviewed. Some of them are possible targets for future therapies. The next Congress will be organized in 2016 but its location had not been decided.

Eugeniusz J. Kucharz