



Dear ECHSA Members and friends,

I hope that all of you and your families remain healthy and strong, and that some early steps of returning to normal operation are by now at least visible for everyone!

During this unexpected and unprecedented period of the pandemic, our customary routine of academic and organizational preparation for our Annual Spring Meeting has been interrupted. Naturally, the focus of all of our concerns and efforts has been to contribute as much as possible to the global struggle to contain the infection and to minimize its impact, safeguarding the health of our patients, our colleagues, and our families.

On the other hand, it seems that the challenges of the pandemic have strengthened our human and collegial ties, aided by the enormous communication capabilities provided by modern technology, allowing us to communicate with ease and to continue working towards the goals of our Association. Thus, I wanted to update everyone summarizing important ECHSA news and initiatives:

1) First, as you know, our special ECHSA Symposium, which had been planned for the end of June in Warsaw, hosted by Bohdan Maruszewski and honoring his contributions upon his retirement, has been postponed for late November. We do hope that, by then, the crisis will have subsided, and that we will all be able to meet in celebration in Warsaw. Still, we need to reassess the situation in early fall.

2) Our Joint ECHSA-CHSS Meeting, an event which we all cherish, and to which we all look forward every four years, is still scheduled to take place in Boston in October. Although ECHSA is committed to supporting this meeting, the Scientific Program for which, from the ECHSA side, is under the coordination of our Secretary General Morten Helvind, we have expressed to our CHSS colleagues our concern that the global pandemic situation may in reality preclude conduct of this Meeting in October. We continue to consult closely with the CHSS, the final decision to be taken later in the summer.

3) In the meantime, as you know from my previous communication, ECHSA, in collaboration with the World Society and the CHSS, has worked on creating and distributing a survey to collect information on the global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on congenital heart surgery. This survey, drafted by our colleague Lefteris Protopapas and finalized in a series of web meetings organized by Jim St Louis of the World Society, with broad inter-Societal volunteer participation, was distributed to the Membership of all three Societies and to many other colleagues. I would like to thank all who have taken the time to fill out the survey, the results of which, with over 200 responses collected at the ECHSA Database by Bohdan Maruszewski and Zdzislaw Tobota, are currently been



combined with many responses from China, collected by Jim St Louis at the World Society Database, and are being collectively analyzed by Lefteris Protopapas. Within the next two weeks, we hope to have produced a multi-Society paper summarizing this important information, to be hopefully published in our World Journal.

4) As we all know, the conduct of Multi-Institutional Clinical Studies has represented a major pillar of our scientific activity. Since we will not meet in Warsaw this June, Vladimiro Vida, our Research Committee Secretary, is already working on summarizing the current status of all our ECHSA Multi-Institutional Studies, in collaboration with the relevant PI's, planning for a web-meeting of the Research Committee later this month. I encourage any of our Members with a research idea to formulate a specific proposal and to participate in this important web based research meeting, where all such proposals will be presented and discussed. For updates of ongoing research and for new proposals, please contact Vladimiro Vida directly.

5) Our other major scientific pillar has been our ECHSA Congenital Database. The Database Committee did meet recently, not with its members travelling to Warsaw, as had been planned originally, but in a very well attended and very successful web format, chaired by Bohdan Maruszewski! An upcoming exciting new ECHSA Congenital Database Newsletter, Edited by Claudia Herbst, will provide a comprehensive update to all.

I am also very excited to report that great progress has been achieved in our ECHSA Database cooperative project with Professor Dimitris Bertsimas, Director of the Department of Operations Research at MIT, on using non-linear methodology based on Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence to develop new objective risk models for congenital heart surgery. As you know, our early work was accepted for presentation at the (cancelled) 100th Annual Meeting of the AATS which had been planned in Boston for this past April, and it has since progressed very much, with significant refinements to the models and development of a user friendly risk calculator. This work will form the basis of an important upcoming publication, for which we will keep you updated. With this blossoming project, ECHSA remains at the forefront of many efforts around the world towards the goal of "personalized precision medicine", and a pioneer in the application of such technology in congenital heart surgery!

With warmest regards and wishes for good health and progress,

George Sarris