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Florence 2006: Towards a medical renaissance

Bridging the gap between biology and the humanities

Organising an European Wonca Conference in Italy was a formidable challenge.

First of all, CSERMEG² is a small scientific society dedicated to research, principally into communication skills. The usual budget was very modest and the idea of assuming responsibility for a Wonca Conference seemed well beyond our usual assets.

We therefore decided to continue with the scientific collaboration of nine different Italian scientific societies (SIMG, SNAMID, ASSCUMI, AIMEF, EGPRN, SIMEF, ACP, SIQUAS-VRQ and CSERMEG)³ in order to involve all Italian GPs in the preparation of this European Wonca Conference.

An organising committee was set up with members of the executive committee of CSERMEG: *Sergio Bernabé* was a constant source of brilliant new ideas that were useful in deciding that all the previous work was useless. *Guido Danti* was charged with putting in order the scientific contributions, and he brought enormous patience to reading all the 1363 abstracts and tagging each one. *Roberto Della Vedova* was responsible for the economic side of the conference organisation and kept a stern and critical eye on our expenses. *Pino Parisi* was the president of the international advisory committee and was the organisers' theoretician. *Tiziana Galopin* was in charge of public relations and our host (we met at her house in the Verona hills). And I myself, *Giorgio Visentin*, had the task of getting these people to work together.

In the beginning it was like a vacation: trips to Florence with charming people of the PCO⁴ to check the quality of their conference organising skills. From 2004 things changed: a concrete scientific plan was needed, together with a forecast of the number of participants. No easy matter!

Nevertheless we always found time for amusing episodes, such as the occasion when we had to settle some outlandish complaint or decide about the entertainment for the opening ceremony.

During the preparatory phase of the conference two curious requests reached the organising committee. The first was that of a Danish GP who asked permission to stage a lecture or workshop on the contribution of the Danish anatomist Niels Stensen, known as Steno, in Italian Stenone (1638-1686). He had discovered the parotid excretory duct, indicating that saliva derives from glands. He had also discovered that muscular function is the result of fibre shortening and not of inflation, as officially taught in his time. Our colleague wished to hold his workshop in the Church of S. Lorenzo in Florence, which houses Steno's tomb in the Cappella Stenone. Due to obvious difficulties of organisation this was not possible, but otherwise it would have been a charming event. The second curious request was from a delegate who, after submitting his abstract and paying the registration fee, wrote to the organising committee complaining that nobody had "warned" him that his paper would be reviewed so thoroughly by the referees. He asked to be urgently informed if his report was not to be printed, so that he could get back his fee in legal form through the barrister at the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Italy. Evidently this colleague did not pay attention to the detailed instructions we put on the site and did not appreciate that Wonca Conferences filter all contributions via a system of independent referees.

For the opening ceremony everyone suggested a typical Italian operetta, but when at a regional meeting we saw the happiness on the faces of the performers of 'Danzability', we realised that this was the right way to present a smiling renaissance for the future and to communicate 'bridge-building between biology and the humanities'.

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³ SIMG (Società Italiana di Medicina Generale), SNAMID (Società Nazionale di Aggiornamento per il Medico di Medicina Generale), ASSCUMI (Associazione Cultura Medica Interdisciplinare), AIMEF (Associazione Italiana dei Medici di Famiglia), EGPRN (European General Practice Research Network), SIMEF (Società Italiana di Medicina di Famiglia), ACP (Associazione Culturale Pediatri), SIQUAS-VRQ (Società Italiana per la Qualità dell'Assistenza Sanitaria)

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