

Working with the Union of National European Pediatric Societies and Associations in “Building Bridges Across Europe”: The Eighth EUROPAEDIATRICS, Bucharest, Romania, June 7-10, 2017

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The eighth EUROPAEDIATRICS, the biannual international congress of the European Paediatric Association, Union of European Paediatric Societies and Associations (EPA/UNEPSA), will take place June 7-10, 2017, in Bucharest, Romania. It will be supported by 49 leading national pediatric societies and associations that are members of EPA/UNEPSA.

In recent years, Europe and the entire world have experienced unprecedented economic and social changes that have affected health care services in many countries. The general perspectives that were foreseen at the beginning of the new millennium had to be remodeled to adapt to these new conditions. Pediatric science and health care in Europe and in the rest of the world underwent similar processes.

A different world requires new approaches to and strategies for pediatric science and practice. EUROPAEDIATRICS 2017 provides an opportunity to continue assessing and updating the status of pediatric science and health care in Europe, thus making its countries ready to meet new and often unexpected challenges. In fact, EPA/UNEPSA strongly believes that the eighth EUROPAEDIATRICS will offer a safe place and a sound scientific and ethical basis for discussing new perspectives in various areas of pediatrics, including education, health care, and policy.

EUROPAEDIATRICS reflects the main objective of EPA/UNEPSA to encourage scientific cooperation between the leading not-for-profit national pediatric societies/associations and European pediatricians working in primary, secondary, and tertiary pediatric care to promote child health and comprehensive pediatric care and to strengthen international social responsibility.

EPA/UNEPSA's Founding Principles of Building Scientific Bridges Across Europe

Founded 41 years ago with the purpose of building scientific bridges between eastern and western Europe, which were then separated by the so-called “iron curtain,”¹ EPA/UNEPSA currently represents 49 national pediatric societies and associations and operates on a nonprofit basis. Its founding beliefs

and mission, as well as its original vision, values, and principles remain in place (**Tables I and II**; available at www.jpeds.com); however, today new political and socioeconomic crises and catastrophes in Europe are having a negative impact on the health and care of European children. Therefore, the motto of the eighth EUROPAEDIATRICS is “building **new** bridges across Europe.” This entails building and rebuilding bridges across cultures, across the existing national pediatric health care systems, and across medical disciplines and different ways of delivering health education.

Fundamental aspects of EPA/UNEPSA's role as the leading pan-European union of national pediatric societies and associations are to understand and embrace diversity, and to foster the exchange of information and cooperation among European pediatricians, enabling them to exchange experiences and share best practices in the spirit of international social responsibility. The existing inequalities in the health status of children and adolescents throughout Europe are unacceptable and should be of common concern to all scientific pediatric societies.

Unfortunately, the health of pediatric patients is rather rarely discussed by others than parents and physicians. It may be argued that children and adolescents are the healthiest segment of any country's population and, thus, their health assessment is of less concern for the health care system compared with the rest of the population. A downside of this seemingly positive circumstance may be that it may provide legislators and administrators with a justifiable reason for reducing investments in child health and child health care systems throughout Europe. This was particularly true during the economic downturn that followed the 2008 worldwide financial turmoil. Unfortunately, the long-term effects of such negative political decisions regarding pediatric health care will be fully apparent only several years from now, and it is easy to predict declines in European children's health and in the quality of services dedicated to their care.

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EPA/UNEPSA European Paediatric Association, Union of National Paediatric Societies and Associations

Implementing Science, Research, Public Health Care, and Education Throughout Europe

The leading principle pursued by EPA/UNEPSA during its 41 active years has been to promote children's rights to health, equity, and social justice through the implementation of science, research, public health care, and education in the European nations, irrespective of their official political connotation or ideological position on delivering education and health care. We strongly believe that such an approach has contributed positively to the general development of interactions and scientific exchanges among European pediatricians, which has ultimately led to substantial improvements in the quality of pediatric science and practice throughout Europe over the last 3 decades. In fact, the development of a strong culture of international collaboration has been one of the most consistent success stories.

Why Bucharest for EUROPAEDIATRICS?

In a recent review, we triggered a debate about the future of international pediatric congresses and how they can better contribute to the education of pediatricians.² EPA/UNEPSA outlined some of the main dilemmas and challenges that must be tackled using innovative strategies for future pediatric congresses. We concluded that key elements of successful congresses include holding more meetings in resource-poor nations and focusing presentations on topics relevant to that nation and also to neighboring countries facing similar medical challenges. Therefore, international congresses and their speakers should engage with the locals at multiple levels, from clinical through policy. Presenting national success stories of child health care services to those pediatricians working in the emerging European countries is a rationale for EPA/UNEPSA planning the EUROPAEDIATRICS 2017 congress in Romania. Holding the event in Bucharest will allow many pediatricians from 23 eastern European countries to attend an international pediatric congress for the first time. Here they can meet with colleagues from other parts of the world and can learn about the past, present, and future of other national child health care services.

For example, the history of Turkish pediatric practice is a good indicator that pediatric care can reach high international standards within less than 25 years, if the organization of child health care is based on a strategy of unlimited communication between all caregivers, fruitful international cooperation, and a consensus of determined decision makers in society. Based on the introduction of the Latin alphabet and the empowerment of women promoted by the president, Kemal Ataturk, in the beginning of the 20th century, as well as on a movement toward increased academic freedom at the end of the century, the discovery of many genetic diseases in Turkey contributed to a better understanding of inherited and other very rare diseases. The close cooperation of Turkish pediatricians with international experts in molecular genetics and pediatrics has allowed the rapid growth of pediatric research. It is also fascinating to observe that the quality of pediatric research reflects the quality of clinical

care in Turkey.³ In summary, the rapid development of good clinical practice in Turkey has been based largely on international cooperation, and many Turkish pediatricians have traveled abroad to learn medical English, new scientific technologies, and other cultures. At the beginning of the 21st century, the Turkish "economic miracle" allowed the introduction of high-tech equipment in both hospitals and laboratories. The achievements of the founding Turkish generation included participation at international congresses, including the Organization of European Congresses of Pediatrics in Istanbul, and the active cooperation of leading Turkish pediatricians with experts in international pediatric societies and associations.

Thus, the new generation of Turkish pediatricians was provided with a solid basis of independent and critical thinking, including the demand for academic freedom to achieve the mission outlined by the pediatric pioneers. If this high standard of culture persists and is not endangered by any limitations to personal and academic freedom, or any restrictions on critical thinking, then the new generation can confidently aim to improve the accuracy of diagnosis, as well as the availability and accessibility of health care, to guarantee equity and efficacy of health care for all Turkish children.

Conclusions

EUROPAEDIATRICS 2017 has the particular potential to identify and address differences in pediatric policy and practice among nations. There is ample evidence to suggest that effective learning depends on active participation rather than passive engagement. The evolution from passive to active learning requires a significant change in thinking and practice by the typical scientific program committees. We believe that the next EUROPAEDIATRICS meeting in Bucharest will offer the opportunity for speakers and participants to develop fruitful professional partnerships. Furthermore, there also is an increasing evidence base regarding the efficacy, efficiency, and overall impact of different teaching and learning methods in health care. Participants from more developed and affluent countries may witness the rapid progress of medical services in low-resource countries and be inspired to develop new services. Finally, this conference also may encourage cooperation among countries in providing cutting-edge medical services for patients. ■

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Table I. Mission and objectives of the EPA/UNEPSA

Mission

To provide a common platform for all general pediatricians in Europe that can offer the necessary tools to keep up to date and feel empowered to achieve their personal professional endeavors.

Objectives

1. Encouraging scientific cooperation among not-for-profit national pediatric societies/associations in Europe and among European pediatricians working in primary, secondary, and tertiary pediatric care in Europe to promote child health and comprehensive pediatric care.
2. Promoting education of patients, families, and caregivers by translating specialist knowledge to generalists.
3. Promoting research in child health care services in Europe by charitable measures, nonprofit-making projects, and activities of benefit to the public.
4. Improving the quality of pediatric patient care in all European countries, including both member and nonmember states of the European Union, through adequate clinical research and implementation of research into practice. EPA/UNEPSA pursues a pan-European approach to reduce differences in child health care and improve the quality of care.
5. Promoting the exchange of national experiences in the various fields of patient care and making national practices and science known to others; obtaining information about pediatrics from national societies and associations, and making it available to EPA/UNEPSA members.
6. Cooperating scientifically with other not-for-profit pediatric associations worldwide, the World Health Organization, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the World Bank, and other national and international organizations, foundations, and other statutory corporations and institutions operating in the field of public health care.
7. Organizing and arranging educational congresses for its members and meetings of the presidents of European national pediatric societies/associations to develop strategies aimed at improving pediatric education.
8. Implementing policies that promote pediatric health care, and forming ad hoc expert committees to study and make recommendations on important issues of pediatric interest in Europe.
9. Representing European pediatricians in relation to the International Pediatric Association as the sole pediatric organization representing geographic Europe.

Table II. Vision, values, and priorities of the EPA/UNEPSA

Vision

To be internationally perceived as the leading pediatric organization in Europe, representing operative standards for uniting pediatricians internationally and facilitating their joint efforts to work, learn, and grow together.

Values

The core values are based on the following factors:

- High quality in any activity performed
- Long and adequate experience of experts and team members
- A real understanding and knowledge of pediatrics and its impact on society
- Openness and transparency
- Global thinking and outreach
- Exchange of ideas and best practices for continuous development
- Equality across sexes, ages, nationalities, and religions
- Integrity to show respect toward all of those with which EPA/UNEPSA is privileged to work

Priorities

- Encouraging cooperation among national pediatric societies and associations throughout Europe
- Stimulating collaborative pediatric research in Europe
- Improving the quality of pediatric patient care in all European countries
- Promoting the exchange of national experiences in the various fields of patient care
- Cooperating with pediatric associations worldwide, the World Health Organization, and UNICEF
- Organizing congresses and meetings to promote pediatric best practice for the benefit of children
- Representing European pediatricians in relation to the International Pediatric Association