

## *Conference Report*

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# **The 4th International Six-Day Symposium. Prague, Czech Republic: 16–21 September 2001**

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**T**HE CONCEPT OF THE SIX-DAY SYMPOSIUM IN congenital heart disease was established by the Council of the Cardiovascular Disease in the Young of the World Heart Federation. Its purpose was to re-establish the importance of cardiac development and structure in the understanding of congenital cardiac malformations, concentrating on pathology, imaging, surgery and related basic researches. The first meeting was held in Minneapolis, USA in July, 1994, and was attended by a small group of young physicians, surgeons, imagers, and pathologists drawn from all over the world. The small size of the audience was deliberate. Those attending were selected on the basis that they had just finished, or were finishing, their period of specialised training, so the symposium could be viewed as a “finishing school”, bringing the delegates up to date with the latest views on the structure of the heart and its clinical implications. With this in mind, the World Heart Federation, together with the American Heart Association, selected a group of internationally recognised experts to form the faculty. An important part of the symposium was that the faculty stayed with the attendees throughout the course, giving the opportunity for considerable in-depth discussions on both formal and informal bases. Another important aspect was the opportunity to discuss morphology with the faculty during workshops, using preserved specimens and clinical material. Drawing on the success of the first symposium, ably chaired by Jim Moller, a second symposium was arranged for June 1997, again in collaboration with the American Heart Association, and took place in

Iowa City under the excellent chairmanship of Ron Lauer. The next symposium, held in Seoul, Korea, was scheduled for June, 1999.<sup>1</sup> This meeting was organised by the Sejong Heart Institute, along with the Samsung Heart Institute, and received additional official support from the Korean Society of Circulation. The programme Director for this meeting, Shi-Joon Yoo, had been an attendee at the Minneapolis Symposium, and another of the original delegates, Hideki Uemura, had made sufficient progress to be invited back as a fully-fledged member of the International Faculty. The meeting was arranged with formidable efficiency under the Presidency of Heung Jae Lee, and with Jeong-Wook Seo as General Secretary of the Local organising Committee. Few who attended this meeting, held in the mountain retreat of the Samsung Global Management Institute, will forget the piped birdsong that woke all and sundry at 5.30 am on the initial day of the meeting. Fortunately, the organisers responded to reason, and agreed to shut down the birdsong, but not before one enterprising surgical member of the faculty had succeeded in disconnecting the loud-speaker in his room!

It is now a pleasure for me to report on the outstanding success of the fourth six-day symposium. This took place over the period September 16 through 21 in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. It seemed for some time that the meeting itself would prove to be a casualty of the horrendous and tragic events which unfolded in New York City on September 11. In the event, the faculty was appreciably diluted by the loss of its Faculty members resident in the United States of America and Canada.

The loss of the North American Faculty, however, was ameliorated by the sterling efforts of the home team from the Kardiocentrum Motol in Prague (Fig. 1).

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Accepted for publication 1 October 2001



**Figure 1.**

The larger part of the home team from *Kardiocentrum Motol* – from left to right, Jan Marek, Oleg Reich, Milan Samanek and Václav Chaloupecky, with the right-hand members sporting the handsome six-day symposium shirt.



**Figure 2.**

The splendid view of Prague Castle, St Vitus Cathedral, and the Vltava from the balcony of the venue for our Farewell Dinner.

The programme was constructed and coordinated by Milan Samanek, assisted ably by Jan Janoušek as Secretary. They worked closely with myself and, in the first instance, with Bob Freedom, with Jim Moller maintaining a watching brief on behalf of the World Heart Federation. Due to health problems, Bob had announced to us his unavailability prior to the World Trade Centre outrage. Thus, the task of chairing the meetings over the six days was shared by Milan and myself, with Milan also organising the fantastic social programme, which took full advantage of the delights on offer in Prague (Fig. 2).

The meeting was held in the Ilf Hotel, which also houses the Czech Medical Postgraduate Centre. The facilities were ideal for our small group of just under 50 (Fig. 3), with a splendidly equipped and comfortable lecture theatre, as well as adjacent breakout rooms for the important workshops. The hotel, previously a hostel for students and doctors, has now been upgraded to a three-star establishment, and the



**Figure 3.**

The “team photo” taken on the steps of the Ilf Hotel.



**Figure 4.**

The contingent from Taiwan captured with the author.

surroundings were exactly as required. The rooms were comfortable, and the beer was cheap. The food was more than adequate, and certainly more than necessary in terms of quantity for those of us who can resist everything but temptation.

By the time of the first day, we were gratified to find that 38 of our initial 44 registrants had made it to Prague. This included two who had managed to travel from Canada, along with a third Canadian who had already been in Europe at the time of the bombings. We were joined by one registrant from Japan, and two from Taiwan (Fig. 4). The remainder came from Europe, mostly from the Eastern block, but with a large delegation from Germany. It was encouraging to welcome a group from the Bakoulev Institute in Moscow (Fig. 5), and five representatives from Poland (Fig. 6). One registrant from the United Kingdom, Frances Bu'Lock, was upgraded to the faculty, in addition to making an important contribution to the Social programme.

Of those attending, most were paediatric cardiologists, with a minority of surgeons, and with one lone pathologist, from Warsaw in Poland (Fig. 7). Encouragingly, one young paediatrician, initially from



**Figure 5.**  
*The team from the Bakoulev Institute, Moscow.*



**Figure 8.**  
*Hideki Uemura, with our Latvian delegate in the background.*



**Figure 6.**  
*Two of the polish contingent pictured together with the morphologists.*



**Figure 7.**  
*Our solitary junior pathologist.*

Moscow, but now working in the United Kingdom, attended so as to get the “full feel” of paediatric cardiology. And, on the other hand, a senior paediatric cardiologist from Germany, now in private practice, attended so as to upgrade his knowledge. The remaining registrants all fully satisfied the criterions as set out by the originators of the six-day symposium,



**Figure 9.**  
*Milan Samanek, again sporting the 6-day symposium shirt, Anton Becker, and David Wilson.*

representing the cream of the burgeoning younger generation from each of their respective countries.

The programme, for the larger part, followed the well-established and appraised pattern of the previous meetings. The opening day was filled with introductory lectures, with the team from Motol filling the gaps left by the absent faculty from North America. The general topics continued through the second day, by which time we had been joined by Hideki Uemura (Fig. 8) travelling in from Tokyo via Paris, and shouldering the entire burden of the surgical lectures. Over the subsequent days of the symposium, we addressed the details of the major lesions found in the congenitally malformed heart, concentrating on entities such as atrioventricular septal defect, tetralogy of Fallot, discordant ventriculo-arterial connections, and hearts with functionally single ventricle. The anatomical presentations were shared by Anton Becker and myself, with me additionally offering reviews of cardiac development, these then being significantly embellished by multiple

presentations on genetic aspects from David Wilson (Fig. 9). During the initial presentations, the delegates heard first-class lectures on the prevalence of congenital heart disease from Milan Samanek, and on Developmental Cardiology from Bohuslav Ostadal. We were all amazed and delighted when, on Wednesday morning, we were joined by John Deanfield. John had been an unexpected casualty of the New York disaster, since he had been elsewhere in the United States at the time. He was able, with fortune, to return to the United Kingdom on Tuesday, and was with us in Prague by Wednesday morning, presenting important coverage of topics such as endothelial function and adults with congenital heart disease. As already indicated, the home team from Motol performed over and above the call of duty, and Jan Janoušek, Jan Škovránek, Jan Marek, Oleg Reich and Václav Chaloupecký all gave superb lectures with outstanding audiovisual support. Frances Bu'Lock, again as mentioned already, had provided support in the opening days, with presentations on extracorporeal membrane oxygenation and fetal Doppler examination. She then provided further support for Jan Marek during the excellent echocardiographic workshops. Jan Janoušek, single handedly, and for three days, conducted the electrocardiographic workshops, whilst Anton Becker and myself used pre-recorded videotapes so as to demonstrate the salient phenotypic features of the various congenital cardiac malformations.

Although it can be appreciated that the programme was packed with science, there was still room for relaxation. An opening get-together on the evening of arrival was followed by an afternoon's sightseeing in beautiful Prague (Fig. 2). Even the weather relented to permit us to enjoy the multiple attractions on offer. The next evening was taken up by "home-grown" entertainment from the six-day Symposium Ensemble, who performed piano trios by Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn. After an evening for recovery, entertainment continued in "U Fleků", the home of the famous black beer of Prague, where

a superb group presented the "big band" sound of the thirties in intimate chamber style, wonderfully supported by a quartet of well-trained singers. The final evening was taken by the Farewell dinner, complete with folk singing and dancing.

The World Heart Federation is to be congratulated for its efforts in continuing to foster the concept of the six-day symposium. All who attended the meeting attested to its worth in emphasising the significance of a sound knowledge of cardiac structure, and acknowledged that this is now the more important in understanding molecular biology and genetics. It becomes increasingly evident, however, that even six days is insufficient to capture the entire breadth of Cardiology in the Young, particularly if sufficient time is to be left for workshops and discussion. It was also clear that, despite the Herculean efforts of the team from Prague, we sadly missed the contributions of our North American colleagues.

It was also disappointing that no delegates had registered from the United States of America. This may well reflect the distances involved in travel, but more probably is because the American Heart Association now organises its own six-day symposiums within the United States. One of the major features of the earlier meetings was the transatlantic interplay in terms of concepts of nomenclature and description. In the light of the burgeoning move towards a common nomenclature, as agreed in Toronto and reported earlier in our pages,<sup>2</sup> we hope that future six-day symposiums, whether organised in the United States or elsewhere, will attract truly international audiences. As was agreed in the summing-up of our current meeting, it is the international friendships made which are the most important legacies of these enriching occasions.

## References

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