

## **Mediterranean Rehabilitation Conference Malta, Forte S. Angelo 11-12 December 2000**

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### **Presentation of the Conference**

#### **Prof. Salvatore Giaquinto**

Chairman of the Conference

First of all I wish to thank the organisers of this meeting and congratulate them for the precise organisation. I am glad to be here in La Valletta, a city for gentlemen, built by gentlemen. Successful meetings were organised so far, Hertzlia, Israel, Valencia, Spain, Rome, by me, and Athens. The General Meeting of the Mediterranean Forum on Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation was held in Athens on September this year. Nations over there were: Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey and Yugoslavia.

Now, I wish to acknowledge the co-operation of Dr. Christodoulou from Cyprus, who wrote the minutes of the meeting in Athens. He was asked to act as the new Secretary of the Mediterranean Committee and he accepted. He will be responsible for the circulation of the minutes of the meeting to all the participants, cooperate with the members of the Committee and carry out the correspondence between the Committee and the members and between the Committee and the organisers of the next Mediterranean Congress. So far, the Constitution of the Forum must be prepared, and circulated to all members for written opinions and suggestions.

Dr. Xanthi Michail from Greece sent a charming welcome address to all of the delegates from the over 14 countries and as the Chairman of the 3rd Mediterranean Congress, she was asked to act as the Coordinator of the Meeting, and she presented the written answers from the National Societies of Algeria and Spain to the questionnaire sent by Prof. Hawk asking the opinion of those countries on the necessity of creating a Mediterranean organisation.

Prof. Amenouchi from Algeria refers in his letter as President of the Algerian Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation that he is in favour of the foundation of a Mediterranean organisation.

The National Society of Algeria will participate in such organisation and it regrets that it was not possible for it to join us at that time. Since the President of the Spanish Society Prof. Hernández Rodo was present at the meeting, the Spanish opinion written in the letter was presented by him and Prof. Arasil from Turkey presented the letter with her opinions and she was asked to explain them.

So let's come to the foundation of a Mediterranean organisation - this meeting is important. We are confident to leave with something giving us the hope, the programme of new experiences and positive programmes. In Athens, Prof. Ring opened a discussion asking all the participants to express their opinions on what to do from now onwards about the Mediterranean family of PMR specialists. He mentioned that three successful congresses have already been organised without the participation of any legal personality of the Mediterranean family.

There is interest in founding an association with physiatrists from the Mediterranean as members. A Mediterranean organisation is valuable because, unlike others in Europe, the development of physical medicine and rehabilitation has common properties in Mediterranean countries. Such an organisation will enable close observation and exchange of information on PMR applications in neighbouring countries. Furthermore, ease of transportation between Mediterranean countries may enhance the interest in the meetings of this organisation. Objectives may be to develop common standards among Mediterranean countries, to exchange information between colleagues, to run studies on disability prevention, which is one of the main topics of our Society, to act in order to develop physical medicine and rehabilitation speciality and its sub-specialities, to inform the members on research studies and reports originating from member countries, to make publications, to organise regular course programmes on selected topics, in order to increase the level of scientific standards and to raise funds from industries by including in the meetings more topics on rheumatology and rehabilitation.

Actions by national organisations may be: (I) to identify and solve the problems of national organisations; (II) to collect together common scientific data, and (III) develop statistical information to be involved in several Committees as a Mediterranean organisation. We can stress the difference in the Mediterranean area and we can organise meetings and provide financial support from international funds. The Society should be born as soon as possible otherwise there is a danger of disappearing.

Our friend Prof. Mohamed El-Abd from Egypt said that if we keep on organising medical congresses only there is a danger of coming to an end. So now it is time to found an Association between people who understand each other because we face our problems in a similar way. Our friend Christodoulou said that if we are going to use the Mediterranean sea as a matter of unification, this must be the starting point for helping doctors in our countries with problems in the development of our speciality and the link between Southern Europe countries and North Africa and Middle East countries must begin. Since we already feel as a big family, let's found a simple union and try to help and support scientifically each other member around our sea and everywhere. The Italian colleague Cirillo will organise the next meeting in Syracuse, in two years. And so Prof. Xanthi Michail said it is better to found a Mediterranean Forum or a league with members from the Mediterranean - but also from other countries - and we must found a simple organisation having legal personality, as Dr. El Mohtar said, and then we will be able to ask for funds or other support from several sources. Dr. Abbadi said that he is in favour of founding a simple organisation with the aim to protect rehabilitation medicine and to make clearer the differentiation from other specialities.

So, finally, Prof. Ring said that it's obvious, from the discussion in Athens, that we must found an organisation, give a temporal name, found our legal personality and so be able to ask from funds from WHO or other sources. Also, it will enable us to establish a functional link with the international and European societies. As I said, 14 delegates after secret voting have decided in majority the next Mediterranean Congress to take place in Syracuse, Sicily, in Italy.

Tomorrow everyone of us will present the state of the art in their countries, and that will enable us to write down thus the last up-to-date state of the art because we cannot disappear.

In Italy we have been supported so far from the National Council of Research, Prof. Nolfè, and I wish to ask him to give a description of what we have done for enhancing this Mediterranean organisation. Grants were provided to foreign young doctors.