



## EDITORIAL

# The European Respiratory Society, 1990–2010: a 20-year anniversary story of success

**N.M. Siafakas (ERS President, 2009–2010)**

In 2010, the European Respiratory Society (ERS) celebrates its 20th anniversary. Since its foundation, the ERS has generated an impressive reputation and history of which our relatively young Society can be proud.

The “genesis” of the ERS was the merger of two European scientific societies: the *Societas Europaea Physiologiae Clinicae Respirotrioriae* (SEPCR), founded in 1966, and the European Society of Pneumology (SEP), founded in 1981. The merge took place in London in 1990 during the joint meeting of SEPCR and SEP; the late Stewart Clark was the President of the unified Society. This unification brought together the basic scientists of SEPCR with the clinicians of SEP in a harmonious relationship, and is considered the driving force behind the successful story of the ERS. The structure of the new Society was based on the scientific assemblies of SEPCR with the addition of a new, large clinical assembly from SEP. Those who envisioned and took part in the merge should not only be gratified by the ERS’s achievements over the last 20 years, they should also be extremely proud of its standing as one of the leading respiratory societies in the world.

In the initial years, the ERS leadership focused its efforts on building the structure of the Society, developing its missions and objectives, recruiting the appropriate staff, and establishing the ERS Headquarters. The first ERS office (in 1992) was a small flat in Paris (France) and was run by a few staff members. Within a few years, the office had moved to larger premises in Lausanne (Switzerland). Today, the ERS owns two beautiful buildings: the Headquarters, in Lausanne; and the Publications Office, in Sheffield (UK). In addition, the ERS runs an EU office in Brussels (Belgium).

Thanks to the efforts of the ERS’s inspired leadership, the Annual Congress became one of the strongest pillars of the ERS. Our Congress is now *the* place for reporting new scientific information and significant educational procedures, for building friendships and for networking with other members. From a rather small meeting of approximately 2,500 participants in Brussels in 1991, the Congress has grown to become the largest respiratory meeting in the world, with almost 20,000 attendees in Berlin (2008). If the number of participants is a measure of success, then the ERS Congress can certainly be considered successful. Another marker of achievement is the reporting of

results from mega-trials in respiratory medicine, such as UPLIFT, during the Congress.

In the years following the ERS’s inception, the scientific merit of the Society has risen significantly. Through the outstanding scientific programme of each Congress and the individual, specialty-specific research seminars that are held each year, the scientific committee has covered many subspecialties of respiratory medicine, including (and not exhaustively) paediatric pulmonology, thoracic surgery, lung cancer, sleep and intensive care medicine. In addition, the ERS reaches out to respiratory health professionals of all disciplines, such as physiotherapists, nurses, respiratory technologists and many more. A particular milestone in the scientific history of the ERS is the establishment of the Lung Science Conference. This Conference has brought and continues to bring young and promising scientists into closer contact with the top leading scientists in their field. And again, the success of the Lung Science Conference is primarily due to the event’s inspired leadership.

Another of our Society’s accomplishments is the development of the ERS School. Education is one of the central missions of our Society; to accomplish this objective, the ERS School was founded in 1994. The School was the vision of the late Jean-Claude Yernault, the second President of the ERS. He became the School’s first Chair, and thanks to his dedication and strong leadership, the School succeeded in becoming one of the best sources of education in respiratory medicine in the world. Its subsequent leadership has continued to monitor and cater for the needs of our members, by offering relevant and innovative educational opportunities. The ERS School has capitalised on the new technologies of the internet and established one of the best websites: the e-Learning resources, a powerful tool in respiratory education. Furthermore, the School plays a very significant role in the harmonisation of European training in pulmonary medicine. After years of preparation and in collaboration with the European Lung Foundation (ELF), the European Board of Accreditation in Pneumology (EBAP), and the Union Européenne des Médecins Spécialistes (UEMS), the ERS School launched the HERMES project (Harmonised Education in Respiratory Medicine for European Specialists). This was followed by the establishment of the examination for the European Diploma in Adult Respiratory Medicine. The first examination took place at the Berlin ERS Congress in 2008.

Throughout its 20-year history, the ERS has produced publications that are central to the achievement of the Society’s aims. In fact, the official journal of ERS, the

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*European Respiratory Journal (ERJ)*, preceded the foundation of the Society by a few years and was the primary outcome of the establishing merger. The *ERJ* is a significant communication resource for the reporting of studies in basic science and clinical medicine. Due to the hard work of its past and present Chief Editors, the *ERJ* has become one of the leading scientific journals in respiratory medicine, achieving a 2008 impact factor of 5.545, its highest yet. The publication is ranked third highest in the respiratory publishing field, and in 2005, it received the ALPSP (Association for Learned and Professional Society Publishers) Award for Learned Journals.

In addition to the *ERJ*, the ERS also publishes the *European Respiratory Review (ERR)*, *Breathe*, and the *European Respiratory Monograph (ERM)*. Published quarterly, the *ERR* presents state-of-the-art reviews, updates, editorials and case reports in topical respiratory areas, with each issue focusing around a "theme of the month". Another of the ERS's long-running publications, the *ERM*, has a clinical focus, with each issue providing a thorough overview of one specific area. This publication has become very popular among the ERS members. The ERS's relatively young publication, *Breathe* is the educational Journal of the Society. An unprecedented success when it launched in 2004, *Breathe* online receives a record of 150,000 hits a year and has become one of the ERS's most powerful educational tools.

Beyond knowledge sharing, education and publication of research, the ERS has also been significantly involved in respiratory issues at a more political and public level. At an early stage, it became apparent that the Society had a duty of involvement in the battle against global health threats such as cigarette smoking, environmental pollution and climate change. In 2003, the ERS and ELF produced the *European Lung White Book*, which provided the first comprehensive survey of respiratory health across Europe. The publication had a tremendous effect on public consciousness, and raised the profile of and awareness about respiratory health in Europe. Subsequently, the ERS has become one of most influential Society's in the world in public health issues. Under dedicated leadership, the ERS has assisted in the development of laws against tobacco smoking in Europe, and has helped form appropriate alliances to this end, such as the Smoke Free Partnership. The ERS also lobbied successfully in the EU and achieved the inclusion of respiratory diseases in the 7th Framework Program for Research (FP7), and has been able to garner support for postdoctoral research, through a Joint ERS/Marie Curie Fellowship, co-funded by the EU FP7 People Programme. In addition, the ERS has a good relationship with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), in particular in the field of tuberculosis. Our Society also supports the Innovative Medicine Initiative (IMI) Project of the EU and European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA) in two programmes in respiratory medicine, with the aim of making drug development in COPD and asthma more effective.

A further way in which the ERS reaches out to the public is through the ELF, which was established in 2000 and also celebrates its 10th anniversary this year! The ELF aims to develop awareness of respiratory diseases amongst the general

public and raise funds for research. One of the ways in which it achieves this is through the website, which is available in a range of languages and offers access to news stories, monthly updates on published research, and a range of lung factsheets. The ELF has grown considerably since its foundation and is developing its own history of success, thanks to its committed leadership. Its public lung function-testing event has helped develop awareness of respiratory health in many countries since it first began, and new ventures such as the recent ribbon campaign help raise donations and show support in the fight against smoking.

Beyond internal activities, over the past 20 years, the ERS has worked closely with the ATS, producing influential joint guidelines used widely in the field and discussing new areas of collaboration at twice-yearly meetings. The ERS has also established firm relationships with other respiratory societies, such as the American College of Chest Physicians (ACCP), the APSR, ALAT, and the IUATLD. A strong relationship has also been developed with the World Health Organisation (WHO), and our Society is a partner of the Global Alliance against chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD). By working with other societies in this way and by taking an active role in the foundation of the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) and the Forum of European Respiratory Societies (FERS), the ERS is able to help increase awareness about local, national and global respiratory issues, and take part in consciousness-raising activities such as the 2010 Year of the Lung.

The ERS' story would not have been one of achievement and growth without its leadership. But there are also two other essential elements that have been central to our Society's success. One is the ERS members, the prime force behind this story. Not only has membership risen from a few hundred to almost 10,000 from more than 100 countries, but the dedication, loyalty and the active role the members play in the Society has made the ERS the leading organisation in respiratory medicine.

The second is the unknown heroes: the staff and the Managers of the ERS. Under the guidance and training of the previous Executive Director Archie Turnbull and the current Executive Director, the ERS staff has achieved the highest standards of professionalism. They are dedicated, hard working people, ready to help the leadership, the officers and the members. We are grateful to all the staff members but we are really indebted to Archie Turnbull who made all of the above possible.

Although there have been significant changes over the years, the ERS's prime commitment remains the same: the improvement of patient care in respiratory medicine and the promotion of lung health awareness. I hope you agree with me that this story of the ERS success over the last 20 years guarantees an even more inspired and successful future, and the continued achievement of these commitments.

Happy anniversary ERS!

#### STATEMENT OF INTEREST

A statement of interest for N.M. Siafakas can be found at [www.erj.ersjournals.com/misc/statements.dtl](http://www.erj.ersjournals.com/misc/statements.dtl)