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“What distinguishes EAACI? We are actually the ones who write the guidelines”

Q1 As the largest medical association in Europe for allergy and clinical immunology, what distinguishes EAACI from other organisations in the field?

Stefano: Yes, EAACI is the largest organisation in the field of allergy and clinical immunology in the world, and it embraces not only the European national societies, but also international societies. So, it's called 'European Academy', but it welcomes groups of allergy scientists, researchers, and clinicians from all over the world. What distinguishes EAACI? We are actually the ones who write the guidelines, the position papers; we have an enormous responsibility, because our task is to tell clinicians what to do in their daily clinical practice. EAACI embraces everyone, from the top scientists in the field to the clinician who is working everyday with patients in the most remote office, in Europe or somewhere else. We are very proud of this, but it is also a very hard task.

Q2 What do you hope to achieve this year at EAACI, and what do you hope all the healthcare professionals present will take from this year's Congress?

Maria: I think that they will learn that new technologies can be applied to absolutely everything. Not only for science, but also to carry out patient evaluations. Now, we know that there are probably not enough allergists everywhere to be able to diagnose and treat the increased number of patients that we are going to have. So, new technologies, like AI, can help a lot in diagnosing our patients. Even if they are in a remote place, if they

need advice, they will probably be able to contact another office to help with patient diagnosis and treatment. I think that this is the biggest message that we can take from this meeting.

Q3 EAACI 2024 will see an array of fascinating lectures presented by experts from around the globe. Are there any sessions that you are particularly excited about attending this year?

Maria: Well, I come from the field of drug allergy, so I mainly focus on that. There have been so many presentations on how we can diagnose our patients with data only coming from the patient's clinical history; this will allow quick delabelling and will have a high impact in the health system.

Stefano: Yes, there are many, many fields in which we are very active, and there are excellent lectures and news in many specific fields. However, I think we can stick to the motto of the Congress: revolutionising patient care with AI and technology. So, all the lectures related to the application of AI in daily clinical practice or in research are really valuable: these kind of topics are very popular, but no one actually knows how to apply this into their daily practice. We are trying to understand and to learn; we know so far that there are still limits, that human beings still count a lot. I think that we have moved forward, but we are still not there, even if there are many fascinating insights at the Congress about this.

Q4 As president, and future president, of EAACI, how do you hope to improve collaboration and knowledge sharing among international experts at the Congress?

Stefano: Well, collaboration is already ongoing. We have several programmes in which we collaborate with other societies. We have our sister societies, we have the national societies (NAS), we have the International Society Council (ISC). We collaborate with many, many stakeholders and societies including regulatory bodies, like the European Medical Association (EMA), and we are active even at the European Parliament. We are part of alliances at the European level and at the international level. We are really trying to uniform the knowledge and the perception of allergies as a serious problem, which sometimes it is not seen as. I think that collaboration is fundamental in this field;

otherwise, this will not fall on the right ears.

Maria: We, as a society, have many different specialties working together. From basic scientists to immunologists, to dermatologists, pure allergists, and nutritionists, we all work together to get the best diagnosis and treatment of allergic diseases. I think that this is a great advantage. We have also learned a lot during the pandemic, which was an opportunity to find new ways of diagnosing our patients, through telemedicine, teleconferences, etc., and this is the focus of this meeting. Now this has come to be with us, we need to get adapted to using it in the future.

Q5 Stefano, how has EAACI evolved during your presidency?

Stefano: First of all, I must say that the best achievement we got under my presidency is that we

came back to normal life, because we were still recovering from the pandemic. Many scientific academies and societies were suffering a lot. We were able to stay stable during the pandemic. Now, I can say that, with this Congress, we are really back to 'normal life', with an exceptional number of in-person attendees. This is a great achievement. In terms of evolution, I think that, talking about new technologies, we have created our EAACI Knowledge Hub, which is the place to go for people who want to have online learning in this field, and this is one of our best achievements. We invested a lot, but the results are now coming in, and are fantastic. I would say to someone who seeks education in allergy and clinical immunology that they should go to our Knowledge Hub. And, between many others, seeing smiles on the faces of our members after the dark time of the pandemic, is surely one of the best achievements.





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Q6 Maria, as the incoming president, what future developments do you envision for EAACI?

Maria: I hope to be able to continue what Stefano has already done. I think that one of the main tasks is focusing on embracing all of our members, to create a network: a network of specific topics, for example, a network of education, a network of research, and a network of clinical centres. Of course, one of the main points that we have to work hard at is to put the patients at the centre of all our activity.

Q7 What advice would you give to clinicians at the beginning of their careers entering the field of allergy and immunology?

Maria: I can say that the Academy offers a huge opportunity to learn; to learn science, to learn about clinics, to make friends, to meet colleagues, to travel. We have a lot of grants where they can go to learn how to do specific techniques in the best centre in the world. It is also a place where they have fun.

Stefano: Following on from what Maria said; first of all, I fully agree with her, of course. The EAACI junior membership is free until the age of 35 years. So, the first piece of advice I would give is to become an EAACI member. This is a beautiful specialty. As a junior doctor, you have to take care of it. The first years are the best ones to improve your knowledge, and to become a true allergist and clinical immunologist; we offer this possibility at EAACI, as Maria said, with travel grants and lots of educational opportunities. So, I would really say: work hard, follow EAACI, and the results will come together with great memories that you will carry on for life.