The European Society of Coloproctology: from the legend to the future

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«Τούτο γὰρ ἐφ' ἡμῖν μόνον, αἱ τύχαι δὲ, ὅπως αὖ οἱ
δαίμων διδῶ, πάρεσι».

Καὶ μετὰ τοῦ πλοίου μῆκε, πηγαίνοντας πρὸς τὸ
«διδῶ».

**Από το «Ἄγε ὦ Βασιλεῦ Λακεδαιμονίων», Κ.
Καβάφης**

“At least this is still in our power; what lies ahead is in
the hands of gods”.

And she boarded the ship, going towards whatever lay
“in the hands of the gods”.

**From the poem “Come, O King of Lacedaimonians”,
C. Kavafy**

Translated by E. Keely and P. Sherrard

History and present

It has been almost 15 years since the constitution of the “European Society of Coloproctology” (ESCP) after the unification of the “European Council of Coloproctology” (ECCP) and the “European Association of Coloproctology” (EACP). Ever since, the ESCP has thrived thanks to the tireless efforts, guidance, dedication and enthusiasm of its administration. The continuous advancement of the ESCP has been primarily depicted in the various educational and training activities that have motivated surgeons around Europe with a special interest in Coloproctology to join the Society.

Education and training

Annual meetings

The constant commitment of the ESCP administration to education and training in Coloproctology is showcased in

the high-quality Annual Meetings full of hot topics presented in the form of keynote lectures and symposia attended by a continuously increasing number of participants (registered in Vienna 2019: 1800; registered in virtual Vilnius 2020: 2900). Training during the Annual Meetings is complemented by numerous pre-congress workshops covering topics of clinical practice in Coloproctology and attended by young Colorectal Surgeons.

European school or coloproctology

During the last years, the European School of Coloproctology (ESC/ESCP), with the financial support of the Industry, offers several opportunities to young surgeons at different stages of their training by organising a series of workshops and webinars with highly elaborate programmes on clinical topics of high interest and demand that incorporate new technology. Robotic colorectal surgery (3 webinars in 2020; 6 webinars in 2021) and laparoscopic complete mesocolic excision have been some of the hot topics addressed during these events.

Training events—masterclasses and fellowships

In addition to the ESC educational activities, an ESCP working group has been assigned with the organisation of regional educational and training events, in the form of a masterclass in different European centres, twice annually since 2015. Indicatively, the Antalya 2019, the Cardiff 2019 and the Lisbon masterclasses (59, 60 and 120 attendees respectively), as well as the Global Reach 2021 webinar (Myths and Evidence in Diverticular Disease 2021—registered: 359 persons) are mentioned. Also, the ESCP offers several opportunities for fellowships (6-month: 1; 3-month: 1; 2-week observerships: 13 in 2019) to young Colorectal Surgeons for the stage of their training. Unfortunately, COVID pandemic has obliged our Society to cancel practically all face-to-face educational and training activities, confining them to a virtual format only.

An additional important toolbox for training and updating is the online “Resource Library” on the ESCP website

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where most of the presentations from the Annual Meetings, along with all other educational and training activities, are uploaded and available to members. Of paramount importance for the trainee Colorectal Surgeon is the *European Manual of Medicine: Coloproctology*, which is also available on the ESCP website. The ESCP training opportunities enable the young trainee Colorectal Surgeon to apply for the examinations and acquire the diploma from the European Board of Surgical Qualification (Coloproctology) of the European Union of Medical Specialists. At present more than 500 diplomas have been awarded.

Research

Thanks to the inspiration and enthusiasm of the Research Committee throughout the recent years, numerous clinical trials involving international multidisciplinary collaboration were embraced by the ESCP, including the RAPIDO, the FOXTROT, the STAR-TREC and the French GRECCAR trials among others. Even more recently, the Research Committee launched, completed or/and published the results of several snapshot audits (Right Hemicolectomy for Crohn's Disease [1]; Right Hemicolectomy for Cancer; Stoma Closure; Left Colon, Sigmoid and Rectal Resections [2]; Conversion from Laparoscopic to Open Colectomy [3]) to which numerous European and Global centres contributed.

Guidelines for clinical management

The contribution of the ESCP to clinical practice is primarily depicted in the establishment of high-quality guidelines for the management of several colorectal diseases. Indicatively, those completed or published during the last year are: (i) Guidelines for the management of diverticular disease of the colon [4]; (ii) Gene and gender guidelines for the Lynch syndrome [5]; (iii) Guidance on trans-anal total mesorectal excision (TaTME) [6]; (iv) COVID guideline for resuming service; and (v) Guidelines for haemorrhoidal disease [7].

The future

A detailed history of the ESCP, including its evolution, membership of all Committees and activities since its foundation in 2006, is presented in a recently published article by Shorthouse and Nicholls [7], two of the illustrious founders of the Society. Among the most important elements in the article is the legacy of the founders left to the successors: the ESCP to be "...the democratic voice of the specialty of Coloproctology in Europe..." and to go on thriving. The current ESCP administration acknowledges and honours the legacy and has the ambition to serve it by strengthening the democratic institutions. The current administration believes

that the provisions in the revised Rules for full transparency, involvement of as many members as possible to the various activities of the Society, and the establishment of new Committees aim to satisfy that ambition.

The global committee

Starting from the foundation of the ESCP and to the present, the ESCP has been seeking and developed reciprocal relations and collaborations with a number of other scientific Societies of the field in Europe and globally, including the ASCRS, the ACPGBI, the UEG, the ECCO, the ESGAR, the EHTG, the UEGF, and more recently the JSCP and the KSCP. Also, recently the ESCP has joined the Tripartite Meeting.

Motivated by the ambition to become the leading Society in the field, the novel "*Global Committee*" is to be established. Its task is to seek collaboration with Colorectal Societies outside Europe, to share experiences, organise common scientific events and create new opportunities for matters related to education, research and clinical practice in Coloproctology, and to extend the ESCP membership. One recent successful sample of global collaboration is the *Global Reach Webinar "East Meets West"* hosted by the ESCP with the contribution of the Chinese Society of Colorectal Surgery and the Hong Kong Society of Coloproctology on July 24th, 2020.

Education and training

The Education and Training Committee and the ESC are committed to an enrichment of the toolbox of training in the Specialty of Coloproctology, by organising a series of Masterclasses, webinars, and online educational portal not only across Europe, but also in other continents. Also, a plan of reciprocal travelling fellowships between the ESCP, the JSCP and the KSCP is under development.

In addition to the *European Manual of Medicine: Coloproctology*, ESCP envisions the development of an integrated syllabus of training in Coloproctology that could be adopted by the Health authorities of countries across Europe and globally, to diminish and soften differences in the quality of training of Colorectal Surgeons.

Research

The Research Committee constantly focuses on the production of "*Real World Evidence*". Within the frame of the EuroSurg Research Collaborative for students and trainees, the COMPASS (Management of Complicated Intra-Abdominal Collections after Colorectal Surgery) and the IMAGINE (Ileus Management International) trials are being launched. Also, the Research Committee plans to extend

internationally its own ongoing research projects EAGLE (the ESCP Safe-Anastomosis Programme in Colorectal Surgery), MASC (Management of Acute Severe Ulcerative Colitis) and PROPHER (Patient Reported Outcomes After Parastomal Hernia Repair). In addition, and in an effort to encourage the sharing of views and international participation, the Research Committee aspires to present titles of trials in Coloproctology around the globe on the “*international trials map*” on the ESCP website.

Inevitably, the COVID pandemic has marked the onset of a new socio-economic environment in our world posing novel challenges and hurdles. For these reasons, we should develop a novel approach to tackle them by continuous assessment of the situation and assumption of the necessary preemptive measures, for the best interests of ESCP and its members, and eventually the benefit of the community. The current administration looks forward to transmitting the spirit of the founders and ancestors to the new generation—the young ESCP members- and motivating them to commit themselves to the legacy for the progression of the Society, with an innovative spirit, a wise adaptation of new technological potentials and prudent financial management.

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