



## EDITORIAL

## The congresses of the Spanish association of pediatrics

## Los congresos de la asociación Española de pediatría

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In September 1923, the second Spanish Paediatrics Congress was held in San Sebastian. The centenary of this event has been acknowledged with the publication of one issue of *Cuadernos de Historia de la Pediatría Española*<sup>1</sup> (an official journal on the history of paediatrics in Spain) and a special article in the current issue of *Anales de Pediatría*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, on this occasion, the editorial board of the journal considered that it would be fitting to invite me to write this editorial

Teaching and research are activities intrinsic to the medical profession, as reflected by Law 44/2003 on the regulation of health care professions. In addition, keeping up with medical knowledge is both a right and a duty for health care professionals, and therefore continuing education must be offered to them.

Among the broad range of continuing education modalities, congresses have always played a special role. The first Spanish Paediatrics Congress was held in Palma de Mallorca in April 1914.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 10 years elapsed until the second took place. The pace of advances in our speciality allows for congresses to be organised yearly with no detriment to the quality of their contents.

One of the statutory functions of the Asociación Española de Pediatría (AEP, Spanish Association of Pediatrics) is the organization of the National Congress. Table 1 details the specific purposes of this congress. Chief among them is the dissemination of the findings of domestic scientific research. The volume of communications submitted to our congress is substantial. In the first Spanish Congress of Paediatrics, only 43 works were presented,<sup>3</sup> and, while the number had

**Table 1** Purposes of the Congress of the Asociación Española de Pediatría.

Bringing knowledge and skills up to date
Dissemination of scientific research findings
Interaction between colleagues
Networking between professionals and research networks
Contact with industry

already increased significantly in the second, with more than 100 communications,<sup>2</sup> in the latest congress of the AEP, held in Granada in 2023, there were a total of 958. One of the objectives of the Scientific Committee in this regard is to promote the presentation of findings of research projects over the presentation of clinical cases.

Another equally important function is to bring the knowledge and skills of participants up to date. In the latest congress, there were 44 sessions, including roundtables devoted to updating knowledge, sessions with experts, workshops and lectures. Sessions with markedly practical content are one of the distinguishing features of our Congress, and one of the features rated most positively by attendees year after year.

The advent of the pandemic forced the AEP to renounce the plans for the 2020 and 2021 congresses, which were replaced by two virtual congresses. Their organization was a significant challenge for the association, and the knowledge accrued through the experienced allowed the Congress held in Palma de Mallorca in 2022 to be the first hybrid, online and in-person congress of the AEP. The possibility of livestreaming part of the sessions and offering à la carte on-demand access to them for viewing at the convenience

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of the attendee opened up a new realm in congress attendance. In addition, offering an attendance modality with a lower cost allowed paediatricians from anywhere in the world to participate in the congress, increasing the international visibility of our association. Thus, in the Congress held in Granada, there were 422 remote attendees who logged in from 9 foreign countries, including non-Spanish-speaking countries.

Another of the objectives established in the statutes of the AEP is to promote and increase the bonds between its members, between regional societies and between societies focused on specific paediatric subspecialties. Although the scientific sessions could easily be held virtually, in-person attendance to congresses allows the interaction with peers and networking, which in turn facilitates the development of collaborative projects and multicentre research. The Congress of the AEP has always been characterised by setting up social activities to promote these interactions. Without reaching the profusion of social events offered in San Sebastian in 1923, which included an evening at the Teatro Principal, a performance by the Orfeón Donostiarra and a formal dinner at the Kursaal,<sup>1</sup> the Congress of the AEP has continued to include an opening ceremony, a dinner for presenters and a farewell drink to serve this purpose.

The celebration of a national congress entails a significant financial investment, both by the attendees and by the association itself. It would not be economically feasible without the support of the pharmaceutical industry which, on one hand, funds the individual costs of the majority of attendees and, on the other, contributes resources through the rental of exhibition spaces and the organization of conferences that are held during the congress but not included in the official scientific programme. This economic relationship between the industry, the AEP and the paediatricians attending the congress may raise concerns regarding the impartiality of the scientific message that is transmitted through the congress. The AEP is committed to the transparency of its management and reports every source of income or funding in adherence to the current codes of best practices of the pharmaceutical and food industries.

One aspect to consider in the future is the environmental sustainability of our congresses. In recent years, the association has been assessing the carbon footprint of holding these events.<sup>4</sup> The travel of thousands of individuals by highly polluting means of transport, the use of disposable plastic bottles and utensils and of paper or the excessive consumption of meat products, among others, have a significant impact on the environment.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to this aspect, the AEP is not only going to calculate the carbon footprint of

holding this congress, but will also introduce a variety of sustainability measures, including the replacement of bottled water by drinking fountains and the elimination of printed programmes to be replaced by an online version that attendees can download with their mobile phones. The future development of high-speed train lines that could be used for travel instead of flights would also improve the carbon footprint.

In recent years, the association has opted for a model by which in each congress, topics within a specific speciality are prioritised. By the end of the 2025 Congress, every speciality will have been highlighted and it will be time to decide whether this model ought to be changed. We hope that our members will offer their opinion as we undertake the task.

The Congress is the main educational activity developed by the AEP throughout the year. Its organization is a constant challenge and its success or failure determines to a great extent the resources that the AEP can provide for its members and affiliates. Although the Scientific Committee aspires to achieve excellence through the presentation in the Congress of the findings of highest quality of paediatric research groups in Spain, we are aware of the difficulty of this goal. In the meantime, we remain committed to offering continuous education in a format that is appealing, dynamic, practical and sustainable.

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