



SHORT COMMUNICATION

# The Venezuelan Cardiology Society – looking at the past with hope for the future

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From the 3–6 of August 2007, the Venezuelan Cardiology Society held its 40th Congress in Caracas. It was also an occasion to celebrate the 50th year of the Cardiology Service at the University Hospital of Caracas. Historically cardiovascular services in Venezuela have kept pace with developments around the world. The first cardiac catheterization was carried out in 1949 by Dr. Victor Gimenez Figueredo and two years later the first cardiac surgery was done by Sir Holmes Sellors with Dr. Denton Cooley performing the first open heart operation in 1957. While many more names and events were recalled at the Congress, the greatest source of pride was the commitment to teaching. In 1957, the first postgraduate course in cardiology was offered at the University Hospital of Caracas. All of today's leaders in Venezuelan cardiology participated in one of the yearlong courses some time in the past. Each year the Society honours its graduates and awards its best young researchers at the national congress.

Having participated in a Congress of the Venezuelan Society a few years ago, it was encouraging to see two major interval changes, both indicating a strong commitment to prevention. The first was

the very low number of smokers among the participants. In past years and typically at such meetings throughout Latin America, smoking among physicians was all too visible. Although not permitted in meeting rooms, smoke would fill the air in the hallways. Later when smoking was banned inside the congress halls, at breaks there was a rush to smoke just outside the entrances to the building. This is no longer the case, at least among Venezuelan cardiologists. Not only have cardiologists and many of their colleagues abandoned smoking but they have also joined the fight against tobacco use. Awareness of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is high and collaboration between the medical community and the Ministry of Health is resulting in significant curtailment of advertising, sales and smoking in public places. Tobacco related issues are legitimate and serious topics of research at several faculties.

The second observation at the Congress relates to the scope of the program, which reached beyond clinical interventions. There were sessions dedicated to the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, including a plenary session on smoking. Another session addressed models of health care management. Given the turbulent times in the delivery of health care in Venezuela, this is a particularly compelling and engaging subject. The

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cardiology community is demonstrating its leadership here as well, which hopefully will have a favourable impact for the country at large. That Venezuelan cardiologists are committing time and effort to these concerns is not a surprise. Under the leadership of Dr. Bartolome Finizola, Lara State has been a multi-partner demonstration site for population-based cardiovascular disease prevention and control since 1976. Along with nine other organizations, the Asociación Cardiovascular Centro Occidental (Ascardio) created the Venezuelan Heart Foundation, which is also celebrating 10 years of existence this year. In addition to organizing World Heart Day celebrations throughout the country, the Foundation also sponsors community workshops on heart healthy lifestyles, many in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

There is a genuine camaraderie palpable in the cardiovascular community and along with it a will

to collaborate. Since many individuals are members of several organizations, inter-organizational strife is almost nonexistent and there is a well-deserved sense of pride in the accomplishments over the years not only of the Society but of all member organizations.

In March 2008, a 5-day epidemiological training course will be offered for the first time in Spanish in Latin America. Modeled in part on the 10 day international teaching seminar, it is being organized under the auspices of Ascardio in Barquisimeto, the capital of Lara State.

The cardiovascular community in Venezuela has much to celebrate and to be proud of. With the strong commitment to excellence in teaching young generations of researchers, practitioners and community activists, the future is promising for Venezuela and perhaps for other countries in Latin America as well.



Inauguration of the Congress.



Over 900 participants registered for the Congress.

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