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Leadership for New Challenges

Right after the EAHM General Assembly (see report on p. 7-8), the Congress got off to an amazing start with more than 600 hospital managers attending. The quality of the presentations perfectly matched the sumptuous main hall of the Graz Convention Centre that accommodated the delegates' lively exchanges for two days. Fittingly, Graz was the cultural capital of Europe in 2003.

Participants were welcomed by a spectacular choir and orchestra who delighted the audience with several musical interludes.

Nikolaus Koller, Chairman of the Association of Styrian Hospital Directors and organiser of the Congress warmly welcomed the delegates and emphasised the accuracy of the theme chosen for the 22nd edition of the EAHM Congress. He stated that the theme of leadership was especially relevant as healthcare in Europe is gaining in importance and the financial weight of the European hospital sector (350 billion euros) requires sound management and flawless governance. Mr. Koller was followed by Mr. Paul Castel, President of the European Association of Hospital Managers, who informed the audience of some of the decisions of the General Assembly that had just taken place and expressed his wish of seeing EAHM members share experiences and learn about each other during the two days.

High ranking Austrian officials graced the congress with their presence: Mag. Helmut Hirt, State Councillor for Public Health and Personnel, as well as Dr Andrea Kdolsky, Minister of Health. They both evoked the issues at stake for the Austrian healthcare system, which are common to other European countries.

Ms. Dominique Acker, representative of the French Minister of Health, Roselyne Bachelot, gave Congress participants a brief outline of the health-related priorities of the French presidency of the EU and assured EAHM representatives of the importance of the Association to European institutions and decision-making bodies.

The keynote address, entitled "Leadership in Hospitals – The Role of Values", was given by Professor Eckard Nagel, the Director of the Institute of Medicine Management and Health Sciences at the University of Bayreuth who also heads the surgery department at the Augsburg Medical Centre.

Professor Nagel understood perfectly how to engage an audience during his presentation, which focused on the current problems facing hospital managers. Hospitals are no longer managed in accordance with the authoritarian management principles associated with Professor Sauerbruch. Likewise, the work of medical and nursing staff cannot be determined by the economic objectives of the hospital operator or owner.

If they are to be effective in the long run, hospitals must establish a framework for action that is underpinned by values. It is safe to say that doctors and nurses are motivated primarily by values in the sense that they want to benefit patients. A competent management team will, therefore, create the conditions in which realising this goal becomes feasible, notwithstanding the financial constraints within which all hospitals must operate.

In many countries, it is impossible to sidestep the ongoing debate on rationing and rationalisation.

However, addressing this issue in a plausible manner requires those in positions of leadership to demonstrate characteristics other than insight and ability. They must also show social, emotional and spiritual intelligence, the qualities that turn a manager into a leader who can motivate and empower his staff to achieve the hospital's objectives.

In this context, Professor Nagel noted that leaders must:

- > have a clear goal or mission;
- > show determination;

- > be prepared to make sacrifices;
- > accept challenges;
- > dare to break new ground; and
- > learn from mistakes.

The Congress audience was visibly impressed by Professor Nagel's presentation. His contribution provided much food for thought, giving all those present an opportunity to reflect on their own work and providing an excellent starting point for the rest of the Congress programme.

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