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Facing the Challenge: Intensive Care Without Walls – ESICM Annual Congress

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Drs Rhodes and Moreno preview the interaction, learning and dissemination of scientific knowledge offered by the ESICM's annual Congress in September.

This year the annual congress of the European Society of Intensive Care Medicine (ESICM) will take place at the RAI congress centre in Amsterdam from 25th to the 28th September. The motto and theme for this year's meeting is 'Facing the challenge: Intensive care without walls'. The meeting will be an exciting opportunity to catch up on research, science and educational matters relating to intensive care and emergency medicine.

The ESICM annual congress is a meeting developed and run by ESICM members for anyone with an interest in the critically ill patient, especially intensivists, anaesthesiologists, emergency physicians, internists and surgeons. The program for this year's meeting has involved many hundreds of ESICM members. The society has a number of sections each with a particular interest topic. Members of these sections propose ideas for the content and format of potential sessions. These are then further developed via section meetings and email discussion into formal proposals for specific sessions. The Congress Committee then incorporates these into the program that becomes the Congress, ensuring that all important topics are covered, that the aims of the meeting are fulfilled and there is no inequity in social, geographical or political content. This process ensures that each member of the society can influence the program and help direct the future of the congress. It also means that the congress is responsive to what the members (and other registrants) want and need.

An important part of running any congress is participation of relevant industries. These industrial partners support the meeting to a greater or lesser extent by being major sponsors of the society, participating in the industry exhibition, or simply by sponsoring one of the identified industry sessions. We see this partnership between the ESICM and industry as extremely important for the smooth running of the meeting. However, we also recognise that all science presented at the meeting, especially in the industry sessions, must be relevant and unbiased. The Congress Committee therefore oversees the content of all of these sessions and ensures that at least one nonindustry sponsored expert chairs each session.

One of the main aims of the meeting is the advancement of cutting edge research related to Intensive Care. Much of the program is therefore available for researchers to present their work; over the last years we have consistently had over 1000 abstracts submitted! These are presented in oral or poster format, and are crucial to disseminate new research, for researchers to get peer review and debate their work, and also for young researchers to learn how to present. These sessions are therefore chaired and directed by senior researchers, who help their junior colleagues present, discuss and debate the work. We don't just encourage interaction; we make it happen.

Although research and science are extremely important, the Congress Committee has recognised that there are many trainees who attend the meeting, as well as more senior consultants who may need updating on basic practices. These groups need sessions with the emphasis on learning, rather than simply didactic thematic lectures. Throughout the congress there are several tracks devoted to this group of attendees. Intensive Care trainees are often working towards the European Diploma in Intensive Care, the syllabus of which is directed at least in part by the Society's PACT distance learning based program. These educational / continuous professional development (CPD) sessions are therefore advised on by educationalists as well as the educational / training committee of ESICM, and follow a number of formats. Post graduate courses prior to the congress include Fundamental Critical Care Support (FCCS) and Fundamentals of Major Disaster Management. Other courses include 'Intensive care without walls,' neurointensive care, non-invasive ventilation and septic shock. There are also CPD sessions within the congress itself, with the emphasis on interaction with the digivote system, competency based sessions, where experts describe the basic core competencies involved in the practice of Intensive Care and clinical challenges, where experts discuss every day clinical practice.

The annual congress of ESICM over recent years has gone from strength to strength. We feel that this increasing popularity is at least in part due to the involvement of such a wide number of our members in the development and running of the program. We hope and believe that the balance of the content is optimal with regards to science and education and that all major topics are covered.

We look forward to seeing you in Amsterdam

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