

Volume 12, Issue 4 /2010 - Roadmap to Top Quality

Opening Ceremony

The 23rd EAHM Congress in Zurich was officially opened by Mr. Rolf Gilgen, President of the Swiss Association of Hospital Managers. Artemis Trio, a three-piece band played the Swiss national anthem as a procession of two men and two women made their way through the convention hall symbolically carrying the Swiss and EAHM flags.

Mr. Gilgen welcomed participants to the first EAHM congress to be held in Switzerland. With the slogan of "Roadmap to Top Quality" Mr. Gilgen stressed the pressure hospital managers are under to ensure excellence within their organisations under increasing financial constraints. He explained that the presenters would present innovative and pragmatic solutions and called for participation and discussion among delegates; to be inspired and learn from each other. With this he called the host of congress Nicole Westenfelder, editor and host of Swiss healthcare programme Pulse, to the stage to start the proceedings.

Ms. Westenfelder was appreciative of her position of host and declared that she would lead participants through the programme but that she would not be the centre-piece. With this she welcomed Paul Castel, President of EAHM 2006-2010 to the stage.

Mr. Castel expressed what a great pleasure it was to take the floor and thanked the Organising Committee for their hard work. As President of the EAHM for a few more hours, Castel emphasised the important role of the association, creating a "social Europe" to share ideas and reflect on issues at a time when healthcare systems are experiencing difficulties. Financial circumstances and strong competition from the private sector make it essential for hospital managers to come together.

Managers share the same values of public service for the benefit of the patient. There are common concerns that require a common approach and common solutions. That is why EAHM set up a reflection group to focus on this common identity, the identity of the association as a stakeholder and a key player in Europe. The reflection group also calls for more attention on young managers and the establishment of partnerships with other industries.

For Mr. Castel, the theme of quality is at the heart of the profession of hospital manager. Quality of management staff is of prime importance. We will see new ways of measuring quality during the congress. We will set a new course and weather the storm.

After another musical interlude, City Councillor Claudia Nielsen, Head of the City of Zurich's Department of Health and the Environment was introduced to the stage. Nielsen emphasised that Zurich does not just stand for chocolate cows and punctuality- it is also famous for healthcare!

In Switzerland healthcare is available to all regardless of economic status- this is how it is written in the by-laws. She spoke of an initiative called Health Network 2025. This initiative is jointly committed with other organisations in Switzerland for an integrated healthcare network. Quality should improve and if possible, reduce costs.

State Councillor Dr. Thomas Heiniger, Head of the Department of Health of the Canton of Zurich, was next to address the crowd. Focusing on the topic "Roadmap to Top Quality", he declared he was happy that this road to top quality has led EAHM to Zurich. Heiniger stressed that it is difficult to define quality but we need fixed requirements to ensure quality. There are clues to these requirements in the congress agenda. The city of Zurich has its own roadmap. There are 17 topics and objectives with an exact plan to achieve them. Two objectives concern healthcare, one of them being high tech medicine.

Dr. Pascal Strupler from the Federal Department of Health was the last to speak during this informative Opening Ceremony. He is the senior guardian of the health of all of Switzerland. Although reiterating the fact that the Swiss healthcare system is well-regarded internationally, Strupler admitted that improvements can be made regarding safety. Hospitals are complex institutions and therefore prone to error and high risk. Risks, however are not always checked. We need to find ways to reduce risks.

In Switzerland one in ten patients suffer damage in the healthcare setting, half of these could have been avoided. To prevent this, quality indicators should be published and next year data of all hospitals will be published to increase transparency, hopefully facilitating improvements for hospitals and patients.

The Opening Ceremony came to an end with a final song from the Artemis Trio.

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