Ten years of the Echocardiographic Society of Serbia: local achievements with European flavour

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At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the former Yugoslavia, there were no organized educational and scientific activities in the field of echocardiography. Existing Working group of Echocardiography of the national cardiology society has been inactive for years.

The new echo organization was born in April 2001, on the wings of enthusiasm of few cardiologists, who felt that the time for change has come. The first name, Yugoslav Echocardiographic Society (YUECHO), was changed in December 2006 into current name, Echocardiographic Society of Serbia (ECHOS) (Figure 1).

The goal was to set up local standards of echocardiographic examination, to run educational programmes, to support research related to echocardiography and to establish international collaboration and join international echo organizations and scientific projects.

Education and training

Till now, ECHOS has organized 12 basic echocardiographic courses. Each course consisted of 2 weeks of intensive theoretical state-of-the-art overview of echocardiographic techniques and clinical applications, followed by 8 weeks of practical, hands-on training in one of the seven referent training centres throughout the country. Lecturers and trainers were the most experienced Serbian echocardiographers, highly motivated for this pioneering work. The formal certificate was issued for those who completed the course and passed final theoretical and practical exams.

It was for the first time in Serbia that formal basic education and training in echocardiography of such a high level has been offered to various professionals interested in the field. The response was above all expectations: 356 cardiologists, anaesthesiologists, paediatricians, surgeons, and fellows attended these courses and successfully completed basic echocardiography training. This educational activity, highly rated by the participants, was the key for establishing affiance between the new organization and related professional community.

Congress

We did our best to offer reliable, high-quality agenda, and this attitude was granted by exceptional participation of our members in all events organized by ECHOS.

We organized two ECHOS congresses with a number of international faculty members from all over the world, and each event was attended by >500 doctors from Serbia and neighbouring countries.

Scientific programmes reflected our view of echocardiography as the key diagnostic tool in clinical arena and the topics were predominantly related not to echocardiography itself, but to use of echo in clinical cardiology decision-making. This approach was highly appreciated by the attendees.

The Echocardiographic Society of Serbia and the European Association of Echocardiography

From the very beginning we were fortunate to get open and full support from the European Association of Echocardiography (EAE). Of note, it was Fausto Pinto, the first president of the EAE, who opened the EAE door for Serbia and generously shared with us authentic European spirit. This sincere and fruitful collaboration between the ECHOS and the EAE was continued and enriched under all following EAE presidents and board members.

Serbian doctors were given the chance to actively contribute at EUROECHO congresses, not only as abstract presenters, but also, for the first time, as invited lecturers and chairpersons.

We got the opportunity to prepare two well attended DICE sessions, in Athens and Lyon, where our young doctors presented their interesting cases and themselves to the European audience.

And finally, in partnership with the EAE and with friendly support of the most prominent European experts in the field,
Through the EAE, we have established close relations with our colleagues from the Western Europe, but also and equally important from Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Greece, and Albania. These contacts have already resulted in exciting educational and scientific projects, and do serve as an excellent basis for more joint activities in the future.

The ECHOS today

Today, the ECHOS has 510 members. Membership is free. Among them, there are 55 current EAE members. This is rather significant number of EAE members for the country with poor economy, and reflects high reputation the EAE built among Serbian echocardiographers during the last decade.

We have a website which is still under construction, where we share important information with our members and promote the EAE in line with EAE-ECHOS active collaboration plan.

Our young members have already translated in Serbian language two official EAE documents, namely EAE recommendations for TEE and for echocardiography in aortic diseases, which are going to be posted on our website and become accessible for our colleagues not so fluent in English, but eager to improve their knowledge and skills.

Our young colleagues are strongly encouraged to join the Club 35, and to take part in making their own professional future.

We have recently changed the constitution of our organization, making solutions to increase the activity of members, by offering freely opportunities to those who wish to contribute. The next ECHOS elections scheduled for the autumn 2011 will be run through the electronic voting system connected to our website, which seems to be for the first time in Serbia that elections for any professional medical association will be conducted in that way.

The future

Serbia is not a rich country. There are only few nuclear, MSCT, and MRI facilities, not available to the vast majority of cardiac patients. Thus, echocardiography for us is not only the main cardiac imaging modality, but also, in reality, the single one that both patients and their cardiologists could count on.

ECHOS strongly promote their members as clinicians, not imagers, and the echocardiography not as an imaging technique, but the most valuable diagnostic tool in a context of clinical decision-making in cardiovascular medicine. This position is well acknowledged and utterly backed by our members.