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## The 2019 European Airway Congress in Catania, Italy: To the moon and back

### 1. Introduction

The European Airway congress held in Catania on December 4–7, 2018 was the 5th congress of the European Airway Management Society (EAMS), and represents an active sign of the growing and intense activity of EAMS. Many international experts and speakers joined the conference to cover controversial topics in the field of airway management. Hot topics and intense debates also left space for hands-on workshops. Innovative congress formats were included such as “meet the experts”, full scale simulation, as well as standard refresher lectures aimed at increasing and facilitating interaction between participants and conference faculty.

The congress was held at the beautiful Sheraton Four Points hotel lying on the seaside of Catania with the impressive silhouette of Mount Etna in the background. Mount Etna, which is the highest active volcano in Europe, showed its warm welcome to participants with natural fireworks and summit activity, which represented a further show in the show.

### 2. The program

The conference program was developed by the EAMS Board of Directors in cooperation with the EAMS Scientific Committee and inputs from its members, taking into account new trends of research and learning in airway management. The conference structure was built around the backbone of 11 key lectures and four of these were presented during the opening ceremony under the motto *science and entertainment*.

Prof Stephan De Hert, European Society of Anaesthesiologists president, discussed the crucial topic of guidelines from scientific societies that are needed to offer our patients the best treatment [1]. This was followed by Prof Urdeneta, a representative of Society for Airway Management (North-America), who gave a brilliant and intriguing talk on the underestimated connection between airway management and infections [2].

Dr. Massimiliano Sorbello, EAMS board non-officer and co-chair of the conference, brought Freud's research into the airway world, searching for the link between psychology and airway management [3], and finally Dr. Imran Ahmad, representing the UK-based Difficult Airway society, captured the audience with the most strange cases in airway management, providing, as per program request, science and entertainment [4].

These lectures were embedded into the entertainment program of the opening ceremony. The fantastic performance of the 70

students of the choir and orchestra from the Istituto Comprensivo Rodari-Nosengo (a musical high school from Catania, directed by Professor Anna Maria Sampognaro) opened the ceremony. The hypnotizing performances of Maestri A. La Colla, C. Lavenia, G. Nicolosi, M. Coco, S. Farruggio, M. Catania and E. Bonaccorso with the participation and coordination by Maestro Mario Scirè draw the invisible line from the past to the future in airway management with a precious alternation between scientific talks and musical interludes from *Cavalleria Rusticana* to *The Godfather* ending up in a specially re-arranged version of *Every breath you take* (See Fig. 1).

Key Lectures presented attractive topics during the congress lectures: the forthcoming Difficult Airway Society guidelines for awake tracheal intubation [5]. The French guidelines for airway management [6] and the DAS guidelines for airway management in ICU [7] were debated in the first session. The issues of airway management and technological development in special patient populations were discussed in the second key lecture session, focusing on obstetric [8] and obese patients [9].

Human factors and non-technical skills in prehospital airway management and the role of simulation in airway management were the two final key lectures of the conference [10], [11].

The many workshops during the conference with worldwide experts in the field covered classic issues in airway management: from laryngoscopy to videolaryngoscopy, supraglottic airway devices, fiberoptic intubation and Cricothyrotomy. Some absolutely innovative workshops were launched over the course of the conference attracting a large number of participants: the obese patient, the prehospital airway, ECMO for airway management [12] and the ICU airway workshop. As so often the airway ultrasound workshop attracted many participants because the role of ultrasound in airway management was taught to identify the anatomical landmarks [13], the correct place for a cricothyroidotomy [14] and its possible importance for airway difficulty prediction [15].

The “*meet the experts*” sessions were also a special and new format of the 2018 conference. These sessions were extremely well received by conference participants. These sessions covered topics from the focus on airway catheters for intubation [16] and extubation [17], tracheostomy care [18], pediatric airway management [19], supraglottic airway devices [20], awake intubation techniques [21], and peri-oxygenation [22] (See Fig. 2).

Problem Based Learning and Discussion sessions with lots of discussion and high participation gave participants the opportunity to get into direct contact with world airway management leaders. The organizers thank a lot the newly inaugurated Trainees of European Airway Management Society (T-EAMS) group, who were very



Fig. 1. Some moments from the opening ceremony of the 5th EAC, Catania, Italy.



Fig. 2. Workshops, Meet the Experts, Simulation, PBLD and main lecture hall during 5th EAC, Catania, Italy.

active on social media promoting the conference and distributing new insights and curiosities worldwide. TEAMS were running their own session in the program and all the core members of the group figured as co-chairpersons on the key-lecture sessions and poster presentations.

The main lecture hall also hosted a series of refresher courses on hot topics in anaesthesia, including rapid sequence induction/intubation [23], airway management prediction and the role of oxygen in airway management [24]. A series of industry-sponsored meetings presented the latest breaking-news updates in airway management [25], with special emphasis on videolaryngoscopy, disposable devices, high-flow nasal oxygen and airway management for gastro-endoscopy [26]. This was designed as an important moment in the conference, representing the meeting point of Industries pushing towards new technologies and the physicians' needs, feedbacks and requests; which is somehow the mechanism allowing professional development through tailored devices designed for precise needs and purposes, exactly how it happened in other fields of anaesthesia and intensive care with mechanical ventilation and extracorporeal support [27], renal replacement techniques [28], the use of ultrasounds [29], virtual airway endoscopy [30] or pain medicine [31].

A room with high-fidelity simulation was active throughout the whole conference sessions, offering the opportunity for small groups simulation with international experts in the field of simulation and airway management aiming to improve clinical performance and human factors in airway management [32].

Abstracts sessions had a surprisingly large audience with great interaction, showing the still valuable importance of face-to-face meetings [33]. The 6 best abstracts were presented by their authors

[34–39] in an oral presentation competition in the main lecture room. The international judges engaged in a hard discussion but eventually declared one the winner<sup>34</sup>.

As a side remark, in the perspective of the ESA sustainable anaesthesia campaign [40], only 500 fliers in total were printed during congress advertising, and no printed program was delivered, any information running on a daily-updated downloadable APP for mobile phones.

### 3. The conference in figures

More than 600 participants attended the meeting, including 58 faculty members and 70 company representatives, making the 5th EAC the largest ever airway meeting organized by EAMS. Participants from 94 countries were represented, including Taiwan, Vietnam, Chile, Canada, India, Emirates, Russia and many more. More than 60% of delegates came from outside of Italy with most of them coming from Romania.

There 3 pre-congress courses which included the EAMS “Teach-the-Airway-Teacher” (TAT) course with 25 international participants, the EAMS Basic Airway Course with 100 delegates, and the SIAARTI fiberoptic bronchoscope course with 35 registrations.

In total 11 plenary session, 6 refresher courses, 21 workshops, 6 meet the experts and 6 simulation sessions were running during the conference. The 97 abstracts submitted to the conference were published in the December 2018 open-access issue of *Trends in Anaesthesia and Critical Care* [41]; 91 were discussed during the daily poster sessions and the 6 best of the best abstracts entered the oral abstract presentation competition in main lecture hall.

Social activities during the conference: 300 people attended the opening ceremony with a 70-units orchestra and choir 5 professors directing them; and eight maestri performed in the five masterpieces. More than 200 delegates participated the “Rock the Airway” dinner, with live music from a 6 piece-musician band.

For the annual airway photo contest came votes from congress judges and delegates via the conference APP. EAMS awarded this year 5 internationally recognized airway management experts with the “EAMS honorary membership” (Dusanka Janjevic, SRB; Carin Hagberg, USA; Ana Lopez, ESP; Vicente Martinez-Pons, ESP; Anil Patel, UK); and 10 EAMS members were recognized as “EAMS Fellows” (Paul Baker, NZ; Hülya Bilgin, TUR; Pedro Charco Mora, ESP; Iljaz Hodovic, UK; Thomas Heidegger, CH; Hans Huitnik, NL; Rüdiger Noppens, CAN; Ellen O'Sullivan, IRE; Massimiliano Sorbello, ITA; Kamil Toker, TUR) (See Fig. 3).

The conference received endorsement from Italian Ministero della Salute, from the Regione Sicilia and from the City of Catania and from all three Universities in Sicily (Catania, Messina and



Fig. 3. Social activity, awards, the TEAMS crew and AIM organizing secretary crew below the congress icon of the 5th EAC, Catania Italy.

Palermo). International societies were also endorsing the conference, starting with ESA and also SIAARTI, SAM, DAS, AIDAA, FIDIVA, FLAVA, AAROI-EMAC, COSDAR, ASSIEU, IOM and Osservatorio Buona Sanità.

#### 4. Importance of the 2018 European Airway Conference

Proper and successful airway management remains one of the crucial needs involved in a critically ill patient's treatment, independent of the setting; many accidents are still ongoing today, and a failed airway strategy remains one of the first causes of morbidity and mortality.

A large conference such as the 2018 EAC was designed and prepared with huge dedication and impressive organizational effort, aiming to offer to all participants a 360° learning tool. Didactic lectures on up-to-date topics were integrated with hands-on workshops for the technical skills and with simulation for the human factors training. Meet-the-experts round tables and refresher courses were designed to deepen knowledge on specific topics and at the same time provide the opportunities for small-group discussions and face-to-face interaction with experts, whilst keeping a very informal and straightforward communication line.

The whole process of both horizontal and vertical learning was favoured and was ignited in the choice of having large room for open abstracts discussion. Combining science and entertainment, a wonderful venue with an international participation, a plethora of airway devices available to be touched with the hands together with the opportunity to have them explained by their inventors or by the best experts in the field were the perfect ingredients of a successful cocktail enjoyed by all participants.

During the three days of the conference, people from all around the world were united irrespective of language differences, age, gender, racial, sexual orientation, religion or skin colors. Being from a well-developed or underprivileged country, or the unimportance of living in the East or West, South or North there were no barriers, just a large group of airway management enthusiasts enjoying themselves together in the common aim of professional development and patients' safety.

Any effort behind the conference organization was paid with delegates participation and feedback and with the conference success, which somehow brought EAMS to the moon and back, preparing for new challenges including the forthcoming World Airway Management Meeting that will be held in Amsterdam, November 13–16, 2019 (<https://wamm2019.com>).

So, to paraphrase Neil Armstrong's famous quote, let's make the 2018 EAC and the future events "one small step for a man, but one giant leap forward for the airway management of mankind".

#### Conflict of interest

**MS** research and development and pre-clinical testing of the LMAProtector™. Paid Consultancy with Teleflex Medical, Dublin, Ireland. Patent owner (no royalties), paid consultancy with DEAS, Castelbolognese, Italy.

**GM** no COI.

**GJM** no COI.

**IZ** no COI.

**FS** no COI.

**RG** no financial COI, R.G. is the past-president of EAMS and the Editor in Chief of TACC, associate editor of EJA.

#### Financial disclosure

None.

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M. Sorbello\*

*Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, AOU Policlinico Vittorio Emanuele, Catania, Italy*

G. Morello

*Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, ARNAS Garibaldi Centro, Catania, Italy*

J.G. Maugeri

*Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, ARNAS Garibaldi Centro, Catania, Italy*

I. Zdravkovic

*Anaesthesia and Intensive Care, Clinical Centre Zvezdara, Belgrade, Serbia*

F. Sgalambro

*Department of Anaesthesiology and Pain Therapy, Istituto Oncologico del Mediterraneo, Viagrande, Italy*

R. Greif

*Department of Anaesthesiology and Pain Therapy, Bern University Hospital and University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland*

\* Corresponding author. Viale Vittorio Veneto, 109, 95127, Catania, Italy.

E-mail address: [maxsorbello@gmail.com](mailto:maxsorbello@gmail.com) (M. Sorbello).

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