EAST EUROPEAN DISPATCH

The year 1988 was rather busy in east European and Russian rheumatology, mostly characterised by bilateral symposia.

The first bilateral symposium of the German Democratic Republic and Hungary took place in the historic city of Weimar between the 27 and 30 April. The main topics were connective tissue diseases and physiotherapy in rheumatology.

Geiler and Vanikova (GDR) reported their immunohistological studies of synovial material obtained by needle biopsy from patients with early (8-12 months' duration) rheumatoid arthritis (RA; five patients) and systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE; three patients). Proliferative vasculitis was detected in all RA specimens, but immunohistochemically—using the peroxidase-antiperoxidase technique—immunoglobulins and complement component depositions of the affected vessels were shown in two cases only. In the three patients with SLE the proliferative vasculitis of the synovial membranes was milder, and neither immunoglobulins nor complement components were detected.

Braunig, Abendroth, and Gassel (GDR) discussed the possible relation between silicosis and scleroderma. In the German Democratic Republic scleroderma developing after long exposure to SiO₂ is recognised as an occupational disease requiring compensation.

Professor Callies (GDR) emphasised the importance of physiotherapy in the treatment of rheumatic diseases and gave clear guidelines for its use.

Bálint, Konrád, and Héjj (Hungary) pointed out the importance of double blind studies in physiotherapy and reported half a dozen such trials completed in Hungary, including balneotherapy of RA and ultrasonic treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee. In the latter study both ultrasound and placebo treated patients improved considerably, as confirmed by clinical indices, and there were no differences in the rate of improvement.

Barabás *et al* (Hungary) reported a double blind trial of neodymium-phosphate-glass laser treatment of hand and wrist joints of patients with RA. There were significant improvements of joint circumference, pain, morning stiffness, and modified Ritchie's index in the laser treated group but not in the group treated with placebo. No significant improvement in laboratory indices was observed.

More than 200 international dermatologists, rheumatologists, internists, and paediatricians attended the first European Gerald P Rodnan lecture in Warsaw (Poland) to commemorate the late Professor Rodnan, a prominent American rheumatologist and expert on scleroderma. Professor N Rowell's opening lecture discussed the aetiological and pathogenetic aspects of scleroderma. For the east European speakers Professor Guseva discussed classification, and

immunologically characterised subjects; Professor Blaszczyk (Poland) proved the possible coexistence of Scl-70 and anticardiolipin antibodies, previously thought to be mutually exclusive; and Professor Jarzabek-Chorzelska (Poland) showed that immunofluorescence and immunodiffusion were the most sensitive techniques for detection of Scl-70 antibodies, present in 86% of patients with diffuse scleroderma and 51.4% with acrosclerosis.

The first Polish-Hungarian bilateral symposium held in Bialystok, eastern Poland, on the 6 September 1988, discussed up to date problems of reactive arthritides. On the 7-9 September this symposium was followed by the XVth congress of the Polish Rheumatological Society with international participation; more than 600 attended the meeting. On the 10 September the inaugural session of the osteoarthrological section of the Polish Medical Society was also held in Bialystok, the topic being 'Osteoarthritis—diagnosis and treatment'.

The 17th symposium of the European Osteoarthrology Society was held in Budapest, Hungary, on 28-31 August 1988 and of many interesting papers presented I have selected a few from eastern Europe for review.

Badurski *et al* (Poland) reported the effect of calcitonin on three animal models of chondropathies—methylprednisolone induced, postmeniscectomy, and immobilisation. Calcitonin prevented almost completely the development of arthropathies in these animal models.

Havelka (Czechoslovakia) showed that even the mature human calcified layer of cartilage is permeable to intravenous tetracycline, suggesting that joint cartilage may be fed subchondrally even in adults.

Ivanov and Rosia studied 92 patients with Kashin-Beck disease. A significant decrease of protein bound oxyproline concentrations in the blood and of oxyproline urinary output was found in all three stages of the disease. In the first stage urinary output of chondroitin sulphates was reduced and that of hyaluronic acid increased. In the second and third stages urinary output of both substances was increased.

Schober *et al* (GDR) investigated 19 female patients with hyperthyroidism, studying the iliac crest biopsy specimens. Both bone resorption and formation were increased, resulting in a considerable decrease in trabecular bone.

Mikecz *et al* induced chronic erosive polyarthritis and spondylitis in female BALB/c mice by intraperitoneal injections of human fetal cartilage proteoglycans depleted of chondroitin sulphate with complete or incomplete Freund's adjuvant. As a result progressive polyarthritis, complete resorption of intervertebral discs, and spinal ankylosis developed. The disease can be successfully transferred to irradiated, non-immunised CDF1 hybrid mice by the lympho-

cytes of the diseased BALB/c mice with simultaneous injection of the immunising antigen. Persistently detectable autoantibodies against mouse proteoglycans occurred in the serum samples of these CDFI hybrid mice.

A new agent for treating osteoporosis, ipriflavone, was also presented in this symposium. Ipriflavone is an isoflavone derivative, which was synthesised in the research laboratories of Chinoin pharmaceutical and chemical works, Budapest. In vitro ipriflavone inhibits bone resorption caused by parathyroid hormone and prostaglandin E₂. In vivo it enhances calcitonin secretion in the presence of a subeffective dose of oestrogen in oophorectomised mice. Ipriflavone also prevents a decrease of bone mineral content in various experimental rat models of osteoporosis. As Orimo (Japan) reported the drug was evaluated in Japan in a multicentre, double blind, placebo controlled trial. Treatment with ipriflavone (600 mg/day) resulted in a 0.78% increase of bone mineral content compared with a 2.12% bone loss in the controls. The difference was statistically significant. Some mild, mostly gastrointestinal, side effects occurred.

The annual meeting of the Hungarian Association of Rheumatologists took place in the historic city of Eger (northern Hungary) on 22–24 September, celebrating the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the association. Professors L. Szántó and G. Bálint were honoured by the Belák medal for their efforts in developing Hungarian rheumatology. Sándor Belák was professor of pathophysiology at Pázmány Péter University, Budapest in the late 1930s and first half of the '40s. He studied thoroughly the mechanism of rheumatic fever and other rheumatic diseases and edited the first Hungarian textbook, *Rheumatologia*, published in 1941.

The main topics of the meeting were history and soft tissue rheumatism and a selection of the interesting reports is described here. Domonkos and Csiszér in a double blind, placebo controlled trial on 71 patients with humeral epicondylitis evaluated low dose x ray irradiation. The indices used—pain, tenderness, patient's opinion, doctor's opinion—significantly improved in the x ray treated group compared with the controls. Rojkovich *et al* studied acetylator phenotype in 100 patients with ankylosing spondylitis by a modified Bratton-Marshall's method. The prevalence of slow acetylators was significantly greater in the patients with ankylosing spondylitis than in the normal Hungarian population. Farkas and Zahumenszky studied 55 consecutive patients with ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. The occurrence of enthesopathy was 29% in ulcerative colitis and 50% in Crohn's disease. Surprisingly, they found functional scoliosis in 38% of patients with ulcerative colitis and in 68% with Crohn's disease.

In Czechoslovakia there were two prominent meetings organised by the rheumatological section of the Czechoslovakian Medical Society: the rheumatological conference with international participation held at the spa resort of Třečánské Teplice, where the main issue was spinal disease, and the national rheumatology congress held in Kosice on 26–27 October, at

which the main topic was advances of rational treatment in rheumatic diseases.

The Yugoslavian rheumatology congress took place between 27 September and 1 October with 400 participants, including delegates from the Soviet Union, United Kingdom, France, Czechoslovakia, and Belgium.

In Moscow the All Union conference entitled 'Local therapy of rheumatic disorders' dedicated to the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the All Union Scientific Society of Rheumatologists, was held on the 7–9 December. Many speakers were invited from different east and west European countries and the United States. Separate workshops were held to discuss surgery, laser treatment and radiotherapy, physical methods, up to date local treatment, mechanisms of topical anti-inflammatory treatment, etc, showing that in this part of the world also the interest of rheumatologists is focused on local treatment modalities.

The year 1989 offers a similar number of exciting bilateral and multilateral symposia.

Personal issues

The death of Professor Marie Sadowska-Wroblewska (Poland) the president elect of EULAR was a great loss for the whole of east European rheumatology.

On the 6 October 1988 the Polish Rheumatological Society elected a new executive committee—president: Professor Henryka Malydkowa; vice president: Assistant Professor Krystina Bernacka; secretaries: Assistant Professor Filipowicz-Sasnowska and Assistant Professor Zimmermann-Górska; treasurer: Assistant Professor Katarzynam Rostopowicz-Denisiewicz.

Professor Hartwig Mathies (FRG), an earlier president of EULAR, was awarded the Polish 'Komandoria' medal for his efforts in establishing scientific collaboration between the Federal Republic of Germany and Poland.

Professor Béla Gömör (Hungary) was elected an honorary member of the Czechoslovakian Society of Rheumatologists, and Professor Heikko Isomäki (Finland) an honorary member of the Hungarian Association of Rheumatologists.

Relations between rheumatologists of east and west European countries have been excellent even since the early '60s, but in recent years their collaboration has certainly increased. Exchanges of experts and trainees have become more common. The National Institute of Rheumatology and Physiotherapy has been chosen as a member of the EURORITS network. The last volume of Ballières *Clinical Rheumatology*, entitled 'Occupational rheumatic diseases', contained considerable contributions from east European rheumatologists. I expect this collaboration between west and east European rheumatology to continue and to increase and that the atmosphere for the 1991 EULAR congress of rheumatology, to be held in Budapest, will be one of mutual excitement and creativity.