

European Consensus Conference on Anatomy

I-40126 Bologna, 22nd May, 2007
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Dear President, my dear Colleague,

The Executive Board of the EFEM met in Giessen on 31 April 2007 to analyse the activities and the role of EFEM during the past year. It held an open, intensive and friendly discussion, during which several crucial points were evaluated, such as the extent of involvement of the Member Societies in EFEM activities and improvement of EFEM activities at the European level. The present letter results from a decision made in Giessen, and I am writing to you on behalf of the Executive Board and of the Delegates present in Giessen. According to that decision, I would like to raise the following points.

- I. The recent increase in the amount of litigation linked to insufficient knowledge of anatomy by medical practitioners in various clinical domains (including surgery, radiology, pathology and obstetrics / gynaecology) has led several clinical associations to reconsider the importance given to Anatomy (including Histology) as a discipline in undergraduate and postgraduate medical curricula. This recent development needs close and immediate attention from the interested bodies, especially from the anatomical societies. Two topics are to be considered:
 - the importance (possibly measured in ECTS) attributed to morphological sciences in the medical curricula at the preclinical, clinical and postgraduate levels;
 - the minimal demands requested/required from the persons involved in the teaching of anatomy, as a prerequisite for official accreditation as teaching Faculty.Both topics are relating to the **patients' welfare** and **the overall quality of health care**.
- II. Some efforts are presently made by several European anatomical societies (Anatomische Gesellschaft, ASGBI, Association des Morphologistes, NAV) to organise and to improve the training, development and accreditation of anatomy teachers, and the American Association

of Anatomists is similarly involved in drawing up training protocols. However, many members of the EFEM are **unaware** of these potentially crucial developments.

- III. A more or less coercive implementation of the Bologna Declaration in the medical curricula is taking place, even in those countries that have officially declined participation in the process. It appears that most anatomical associations ignore what is happening outside of their own "territory". Most of the **decisions** are taken without the advice, or the knowledge, of anatomists.
- IV. In the absence of cooperation between anatomical societies, there is a risk that **divergent opinions** are officially expressed and that **incompatible positions** are taken by anatomists across Europe. Such discrepancies would be absolutely detrimental not only to the future of anatomy but mainly to the quality of medical education and training, and consequently of health care.

In addition to the Board's concerns, I would like to share the following reflections with you. Anatomy and Histology, though still representing the fundamental background of all medical branches, tended to have been somewhat neglected during the last decades because of the extraordinary, and excitingly marvellous, development of Molecular Biology and Genetics. Accordingly, colleagues who teach Anatomy have discovered that enrolment of young scientists to learn and teach Human Morphology is becoming increasingly difficult. On the other hand, countries in which the impact of Morphological Sciences in the medical curricula had previously been reduced dramatically currently experience a return to anatomy, both in research and in education.

In view of these facts, the Board of EFEM proposes that a **Meeting of the Presidents and delegates of all EFEM Member Societies, open to other Anatomical Societies in Europe, is held in November 2007**, with the purpose of:

- (a) bringing all anatomical societies to the same level of **information** about differences in the place of anatomy in the medical curricula across Europe and the recruitment and training of anatomists;
- (b) considering the value of developing a **training programme** (perhaps with accreditation) for professional anatomists;
- (c) identifying any **scientific organisations** also interested in morphological sciences and likely to share EFEM's concerns;
- (d) and issuing a list of **recommendations** to be made to the Authorities (regional, national and European) responsible for approving programmes and accrediting institutions that deal with education in medicine and paramedical sciences.

This last goal could be approached by answering several practical questions, such as for example. (1) Is an agreement possible between different European anatomical societies to develop international scientific programmes enabling to obtain EU or regional grants? (2) Is there European consensus on the minimal requirements for professional competence of persons teaching Anatomy or wishing to get a PhD based on the discipline? (3) What should be the core contents of a Master programme in Morphological Sciences? (4) Can Morphologists have a professional activity incorporated within the Health system of a country (what can we do, what are we able to do; are there already any morphologists with specific competences in their field in their own country)?

EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR EXPERIMENTAL MORPHOLOGY (EFEM)

The President

It is impossible to immediately outline or detail all the aspects that should be debated on during the proposed Conference. However, I would like to ask if you, or some interested and responsible Officers of your Society, could participate in such a meeting. **I am expecting to receive your response by the end of June.**

Naturally, I would be most grateful for any suggestions from your side on the subject, as well as on any other items to be considered in the agenda.

Looking forward to receiving your reply and to debating with you and your colleagues on the future of Anatomy as a discipline in Europe, I remain, dear President and Colleague,

Yours cordially,

Giovanni Mazzotti

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