

Dear President and Executive Board,

Leeds, UK, 10<sup>th</sup> Oct.2020

On Friday 18<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2020, I had the pleasure of participating in the 1<sup>st</sup> ESPES E-Congress (10<sup>th</sup> ESPES Annual Congress). The event was clear proof of the progressive nature of ESPES as a scientific and pro-technology organisation and the dedication of those who worked so hard to make it happen.

Philippe Montupet (the principle organiser) supported by Henri Steyaert, Mario Mendoza -Sagon, Ciro Esposito, as well as other ESPES Executives, delivered an exceptional event in this unprecedented time. Of course, this would not have been possible without the generosity and technical support from IRCAD where the actual event was orchestrated.

The daylong congress was faultless from the start to finish, with 444 participants (909 registrants) from 78 countries participating in 20 scientific presentations, 1 round table discussion, 3 lectures, as well as simultaneous YouTube broadcasting.

Presenters were given advanced notice, clear instructions, and an individual trial test more than once to ensure the smooth running of the event. Attendees were provided with a chat window in which they could ask questions and interacted with the presenter and chairpersons. Technical assistants were at hand at all times, the audio-visuals were of high quality and the actual platform could not have been more user-friendly. To date there have been a further 1.1k E visits to the Congress website and I am sure we will be witnessing many more visitors in the coming days and months.

The quality of live such a large-scale exchange and mass articulation was exceptional. The demonstration of information between people and machines, working remotely from one another but linked by a telecommunications system was a dream come true for me.

It is interesting to note that the idea of remote conferencing is not new. Clinicians (Surgeons in particular) have had E-Congressing (video/virtual congress) on their wish list for nearly 3 decades. First audio conferencing then video became a reality a decade or so ago. However, although becoming gradually more popular the technologies involved were only used on a small scale and only for short meetings. This year the global outbreak of Coronavirus has forced people around the world to adapt quickly and work remotely as a matter of daily routine. This has been the catalyst for the congress held on 18<sup>th</sup> Sept, a full day of mass audio-visual communication, which was the first in the world of paediatric surgery and one of few in the entire world of medicine and surgery.

Of course, it is always more ideal to have these types of events face to face. Being there in person allows for better exchange of information, since both speaker and listener are able to see and interpret body language and facial expressions. However, even without a global pandemic the task of getting a large number of people in one place is not easy.

Irrespective of what might happen to the current and future pandemics, E – congressing is here to stay and can only become more and more attractive with the continued advances of audio-video technology. The massive cost and time savings for both the organisers and attendees alike cannot be overlooked when utilising these technologies. Another important element is also the possible wider participation of more surgeons and industries around the globe, with even opportunities for the public to become involved.

On behalf of ESPES members and the public worldwide, I would like to thank Philippe and fellow Executives for the helpful, and memorable experience. We trust Mario -President and the Board will ensure that E – Congressing will become a regular part of ESPES for now and in the future.

Azad Najmaldin (ESPES Founder and Honorary Member)