

## Meeting report

### First Systemic Sclerosis World Congress

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*Received and accepted on September 15,  
2010.*

*Clin Exp Rheumatol 2010; 28 (Suppl. 62):  
S1-S2.*

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EXPERIMENTAL RHEUMATOLOGY 2010.*

**Key words:** systemic sclerosis

Between February 11-14<sup>th</sup> 2010, the first Systemic Sclerosis World Congress took place in Florence, Italy, under the auspices of the recently formed, Swiss based World Scleroderma Association ([www.w-s-a.net](http://www.w-s-a.net)). The program included an intense program consisting of 34 didactic presentations from world experts, interactive workshops and case presentations covering all aspects of systemic sclerosis. There was a focus on translational and clinical medicine, a patient-oriented teaching day and six industry-supported symposia.

A recent increase in translational and clinical knowledge concerning various

aspects of systemic sclerosis, continued interest in new therapeutic options and a slowly expanding therapeutic armamentarium suggested that such a congress would be appropriate.

Planning included both health professionals and patients. The resulting program was both broad and new. Innovative aspects such as a mentoring program for young investigators added texture to the congress.

The anticipated attendance of 500 expanded to an enthusiastic attendance of 1500 physicians, scientists, patient groups and industry from 61 countries. Only space limitations limited even

**Fig. 1.** M. Matucci-Cerinic, D. Furst and A. Tyndall sign the WSA statutes.



**Fig. 2.** Dame Prof. Carol Black opens the scientific programme.



*Conflict of interest: Dr Furst is a consultant to and receives research grants from Actelion and Gilead; the other co-authors have declared no competing interests.*

greater attendance. Patients were represented by 129 members of the Federation of European Scleroderma Associations (FESCA) and even some patients from the Scleroderma Foundation of America were able to attend.

Support for this next generation of scientists and physicians was evident by the 42 oral abstract presentations and 362 selected posters.

The congress was officially opened in the Palazzo Vecchio by Alexander Klee, patron of the World Scleroderma Association (WSA). Alexander Klee, also an artist, is the grandson of Paul Klee, a resident of Switzerland who succumbed to this terrible disease in his 60<sup>th</sup> year, his later paintings and drawings graphically portraying his suffering. After a series of talks by local dignitaries, there was a very mov-

ing discussion by a patient who shared her difficult experiences dealing with this disease. Appropriately the WSA had its inaugural dinner on the evening of Wednesday February 10<sup>th</sup> in the beautiful Bellini Gallery in Florence, strengthening the theme of scleroderma and art. Figure 1 shows the signing of the statutes under the careful scrutiny of Donatello's Madonna.

The scientific program opened with a lecture by Dame Professor Carol Black, a pioneer in the field, entitled "Scleroderma – history and prospective" (Fig. 2) in which she echoed the cautious optimism which is starting to permeate this field, although, much work is still required.

The congress also provided a forum for strengthening contacts and forming new networks across disciplines and

national borders, so necessary for such a complex and relatively uncommon disorder. Many of the biological issues raised by scleroderma are also relevant to other more common chronic fibrosing disorders, and the Systemic Sclerosis World Congress is one forum where synergies and collaborations could be born.

The next congress will take place in Madrid on 1-3<sup>rd</sup> Jan, 2012, and will continue on a 2-year cycle timed to complement the biannual Scleroderma Workshop which focuses on basic science.

Details are available on the congress website, [www.sscworldcongress.org](http://www.sscworldcongress.org). Any person or organisation involved with scleroderma is welcome to contribute and participate.