

*Editorial Comments***XI Congresses of the Balkan Cities Association of Nephrology, Transplantation and Artificial Organs-Bantao, Timisoara, 26-29 September 2013**Momir Polenakovic¹ and Goce Spasovski²¹Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts, ²University Department of Nephrology, University of Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

Now when approaching the XI BANTAO Congress in Timisoara, we should remind ourselves about the beginnings of our Association, which was established 20 years ago in Ohrid. The Balkan Cities Association of Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation and Artificial Organs (BANTAO) was born on October 9, 1993 during the I Congress of the Macedonian Society of Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation and Artificial Organs (MSNDTAO) held in Ohrid [1]. At that time there was a bloody and devastating war in former Yugoslavia, but the nephrologists from the Balkans showed willingness to continue the mutual cooperation. The idea was to create an association between nephrologists from the cities of the Balkans (who are friends and) who would support the mutual cooperation without borders or any negative ideology. Hence, the main goals of BANTAO were set: to promote scientific and technical cooperation in the field of renal disease and artificial organs between the cities of the Balkan Peninsula and the world, giving an opportunity for exchange of experience and knowledge among the experts in the area and to engage them in collaborative projects in order to demonstrate the cooperation is possible even on the turbulent Balkans. A task force was formed from representatives of different cities from the Balkan Peninsula to make this project a reality including the following members: S. Kodra (Tirana), D. Nenov (Varna), Z. Kirjakov (Sofia), Gj. Masin (Skopje), M. Polenakovic (Skopje), F. Akcicek (Izmir), E. J. Dorhout Mess (Izmir), Lj. Djukanovic (Belgrade), A. Radmilovic (Belgrade) and S. Strahinjic (Nis). Momir H. Polenakovic, the President of the MSNDTAO, was elected as chairman of the task force. Besides nephrologists from Balkan cities, our international colleagues H. Klinkman, J. Vienken, E. J. Dorhout Mees, D. Falkenhagen and P. Ivanovich helped us in the creation of platform for the Association. The I BANTAO Congress was held in Varna from September 22nd to 24th, 1995. The President of the congress was D. Nenov (Varna). The congress in Varna was very successful, with more than 80 papers presented by nephrologists from the Balkans as well as from other European cities. The I Congress of BANTAO was accepted very positively among the nephrology community in Europe as

well. Our well known colleague from Spain, F. Valderrabano has published a congress report [2]: "Nephrologists of the Balkan countries meet across political frontiers and war fronts-an example to politicians! BANTAO: a new European medical association overcomes political obstacles". This is an extraordinary initiative of nephrologists working in cities throughout the Balkan countries who have been able to create a scientific association and to organize its first congress, despite the boundaries of war, the rupture of international relations and other serious political problems which emerged in the Balkan countries after the disappearance of the former Republic of Yugoslavia.

The main goal of BANTAO is to promote scientific and technical cooperation in the field of renal diseases and artificial organs between the Balkan cities. This goal will be achieved not only through a periodical congress, but also through lecturers exchange, fellowship exchange, scientific research methods exchange, joint meetings and courses, publications and cooperation in the field of renal transplant. BANTAO wants to work closely with other international societies, especially with EDTA-ERA. BANTAO represents an extraordinary initiative and should receive both scientific and economic support from the EDTA-ERA. The exceptional effort of collaboration shown by our Balkan colleagues, who have been able to carry out scientific activities in extremely adverse human conditions, is an example to the European nephrological community, which should not hesitate to offer all possible help to this new association. The II Congress of BANTAO was held in Struga, Republic of Macedonia from September 6th to 10th, 1997 [3]. The II Congress of BANTAO was sponsored by the European Society for Artificial Organs (ESAO), the International Society for Artificial Organs (ISAO), the International Faculty for Artificial Organs (INFA) and the ERA-EDTA. It was held in conjunction with the Second Congress of the Macedonian Society of Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation and Artificial Organs. The President of the Congress was M. Polenakovic [4]. The III BANTAO Congress was held in conjunction with the Sixth Yugoslav Congress of Nephrology in Belgrade from September

18th to 20th, 1998. The President of the Congress was Lj. Djukanovic (Belgrade). The main topics were: renal replacement therapy in the BANTAO region, the role of auxiliary therapy in chronic renal failure and tubulointerstitial disorders and diseases. A post-congress symposium was devoted to Balkan endemic nephrology. The IV Congress of BANTAO in conjunction with the 16th Congress of the Turkish National Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation and Hypertension Society was held in Izmir, Turkey from 14th to 16th November, 1999. F. Akcicek (Izmir) was the President of the Congress. The V Congress of BANTAO was held in Thessaloniki from September 30th to October 3rd, 2001. Ch. P. Stathakis (Athens) was the President of the Congress. The Congress was a great success. Seventy-two lectures were presented, 59 of which were published in a special supplement to *Nephrology Dialysis Transplantation: Official Publication of the ERA-EDTA*. In total 250 abstracts were submitted and approximately 600 participants attended the Congress [5]. The VI Congress of BANTAO was held for the second time in Varna from 6th to 9th October 2003 under the Presidency of D. Nenov (Varna). More than 400 medical doctors from 72 Balkan cities participated in the work of the Congress presenting the highest ever number of abstracts-343. A very important event for the Association was the First issue of the BANTAO journal [6]. The VII Congress of BANTAO was held in Ohrid from 8th to 11th September, 2005. A total of 270 abstracts were accepted, 43 for oral presentation (free communications) and the remaining 227 for poster presentations. The President of the Congress was M. Polenakovic (Skopje). Here, at the VII BANTAO Congress for the first time a CME Course was organized by ERA-EDTA and ISN-COMGAN entitled *Frontiers in Nephrology* organized by G. Spasovski [7]. The VIII BANTAO Congress was held in Belgrade, from 16th to 19th September, 2007. The President of the Congress was V. Nestic. There were 184 abstracts submitted to the Congress, 47 as oral presentations and 137 posters, as well as 60 guest lecturers. The IX BANTAO Congress was held in Antalya, from 18th to 22nd November, 2009. The President of the Congress was A. Basci (Izmir). The Congress was held together with the 26th National Congress of nephrology, hypertension, dialysis and transplantation-Turkey and the 19th National congress of renal diseases, dialysis and transplantation nursing-Turkey. A total of 220 abstracts were submitted; there were 50 guest lecturers, 52 oral and 168 poster presentations. The X BANTAO Congress was held in Chalkidiki from 13th to 15th October, 2011. It was jointly organized with the 82nd Scientific meeting of the Hellenic Society of Nephrology. Also, an ERA-EDTA CME Course entitled *Vasculitides* was held. The President of the Congress was D. Tsakiris. Overall 245 abstracts were submitted; there were 56 guest lecturers and 41 oral and 204 poster presentations.

An extremely important event in the existence of BANTAO was the appearance of the BANTAO journal in 2003, which is published biannually. In the past 10 years, 20 regular issues and 2 supplements (Antalia and Chalkidiki congresses) have been published. Editors of the journal were as follows: Dimitar Nenov (2003-2005); Ali Basci

(2005-2009); Goce Spasovski (2009). Until now, 332 papers have been published. The BANTAO journal is included in the following databases: EBSCO, DOAJ and SCOPUS. Hence, it may be said that the journal is a "glue" between the nephrologists from the Balkan cities.

Despite the difficulties imposed by major events, such as devastating wars and catastrophic earthquakes in many countries of the Balkan Peninsula BANTAO has made a considerable progress. The BANTAO Congress was established as the major scientific and institutional forum for Balkan nephrologists, with its own journal, indicating our will to communicate, to collaborate, to get to know each other and to share our difficulties. We do expect our further successful work of BANTAO.

What should be our aims for the future?

- To improve further cooperation between the nephrologists and doctors from other related medical specialties from the Balkan cities as well as with colleagues from Europe and the world.
- To improve basic and clinical education and research in nephrology as well as research equipment and facilities.
- To discover, treat and register patients with CKD as well as accomplish registers for renal biopsy, rare renal diseases, etc.
- To perform an early diagnosis of diabetes mellitus and hypertension, to stop or postpone renal tissue damage and/or progression and prevent the end-stage renal disease development.
- To improve renal transplantation, to establish Balkan transplant network and to join the other renal transplant networks in Europe.
- To improve fight against infections (especially against hepatitis C).
- To organize mutual clinical trial.

Finally, we need further improvement of our BANTAO journal as the most important bond between the nephrologists of the Balkan cities. At the same time, we should make efforts to include the journal in Medline/PubMed and to receive an impact factor as a respected journal in the field of nephrology.

We expect further successful work of the XI BANTAO Congress and the ERA-EDTA supported CME Course "*Improving the patient and graft survival in kidney transplantation-an update*".

Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

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