

Opening congress March 13, 2009: 'Sarcoidosis: an update'.

Prof. Dr. Gerard P.M.F.Mols, Rector Magnificus at the University of Maastricht since 2004.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and a very warm welcome to Maastricht and Maastricht University. We are very proud of having with us such a group of excellent scientists and practitioners, coming from all over the world, very dedicated and determined to contribute to a better understanding of the causes as well as the treatment of sarcoidosis and other interstitial lung diseases. I would like to compliment the organizers, especially professor Marjolein Drent, for organizing this meeting and for doing so in Maastricht at our university.

Maastricht is for various reasons the place to be, today one of them being the start of the famous European fine art fair, which is not only a beautiful fair in terms of its paintings and other works of art, but it also gives its visitors, walking around, at least the idea of being unaffected by the world wide financial and economic crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen, more than fifty years ago, to be more precisely fifty one years ago, the sarcoidosis movement held its first congress in London, UK. According to Rizatto in his history of the WASOG and current activities, there were twenty two participants from eight countries. It looks like this was the beginning of an international and even global movement which led to the foundation of the World Association of Sarcoidosis and other Granulomatous diseases in 1987. This globalization is currently also fed by the very practical scientific social network of researchers on biomed experts in sarcoidosis and other lung diseases.

It is my belief that internationalization and even globalization is a sine qua non for scientific development. But it also contributes to the world being a better place to be, by bringing people together from different backgrounds, different cultures, different religions, languages and disciplines. A better mutual understanding, which this world sometimes is lacking seriously, is necessary in order to make the world a global village of people tolerating each other and willing to improve health and well being. Universities and scientists have a serious duty to fulfill and building an international community of scientists to make the world a better place to be is exactly what Maastricht University aims for.

Students from all over the world as well as teachers and researchers come to Maastricht. 40 % of our students come from abroad, and not only from Germany or Belgium, but also from other countries within the European Union and beyond. All our master programs are taught in English as well as many bachelor programs. Thanks to our system of problem based learning, students learn in small tutorial groups by solving real problems, working together, bringing in ideas from different disciplines, experiences and backgrounds. We strive to create a real international multicultural classroom since we believe that could contribute to an even better problem solving process.

If I am informed correctly, this is exactly what WASOG is striving for, at least according to the website of the world conference in 2011 in Maastricht, namely a multidisciplinary approach, mandatory in interstitial lung disease, teamwork in all its facets and exchanging knowledge. The board of the 2011 world congress foundation would like to attract people with a diverse background aiming to stimulate a challenging discussion and fruitful scientific exchange.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's meeting is fifty one years after the first meeting of the sarcoidosis movement. Many have been held since then and others will come soon. It is our duty to make the best of these meetings since many people are suffering from sarcoidosis or another interstitial lung disease. There is still a lot of work to do. As scientists and practitioners, we aim to optimize the care of patients, to broaden knowledge, to share ideas, and to support research on the impact of these diseases on patients and their relatives.

I am quite sure that today's conference as well as the world congress in 2011 will contribute to the development of new insights and new therapies. Even more important, I sincerely hope that new friendships are made, friendships for life, friendships to serve mankind, made in Maastricht. Then there is another good reason to come back to Maastricht, not only in 2011 but also in 2012, the year of the silver jubilee of your organization, to intensify our international scientific friendship made in Maastricht.

I wish you a pleasant stay and a fruitful conference.
Thank you.