

International Conference on Hyperbaric Medicine Meeting, Buenos Aires, December 2014

The ICHM is a world-wide organization for physicians and scientists interested in all aspects of diving and hyperbaric medicine. The organization has minimal formal structure and is entirely dedicated to hosting an international scientific congress every three years with the purpose of improving understanding among the international hyperbaric community. Over the last few years, the ICHM has re-focused its attention on bringing together the professional organizations around the globe. The most recent International Congress was held on the waterfront of Buenos Aires (BA) in the Catholic University 02–06 December 2014. Once again, delegates had the opportunity to meet and talk about those subjects most dear to our hearts. As always, the meeting presented an eclectic view of diving and hyperbaric medicine, with a broad spectrum of opinions on offer.

For this delegate, just getting there was an experience in itself. We went via Valparaiso, the Chilean Atacama desert, the falls at Iguacu and the wine country around the wonderful town of Mendoza before reaching the sprawling metropolis of BA. I thoroughly recommend visiting this part of the world.

The meeting started with two pre-courses with the themes of safety and medical aspects of diving. Day 1 consisted of formal presentations on diving safety from both the diving operations viewpoint and the science of safe diving. Excellent reviews from Neal Pollock and his DAN colleague, Petar Denoble covered PFO and diving, decompression stress management and the increasing use of checklists. Coupled with talks from other accomplished workers in the field, the day was full of information. Day 2 dealt with the medical aspects of technical diving – the highlight being a thorough examination of the science and practice of deep stops from Simon Mitchell. The day was rounded off by discussions on hyperbaric chamber safety and an excellent summary of the ‘normobaric paradox’ from Tino Balestra.

The meeting proper got underway with our host and President, Professor Jorge Pisarello giving us a potted history of the organisation. This was followed by a series of review papers putting the use of HBOT in perspective for chronic conditions (Helen Gelly USA), acute conditions (Mariza D’Agostino, Brazil) and infections (Folke Lind, Sweden). The highlight presentations in the afternoon, in this correspondent’s view, were Jasek Kot’s discussion of oxygen toxicity (thorough and intelligible as ever) and Daniel Mathieu on which patients deserve HBOT for CO poisoning.

Over the next two days we heard from a bewildering array of experts from a total of 20 different countries on a hugely diverse range of topics. The fascination in these meetings lies in identifying both the points of confluence and difference between us. The insights one can get into one’s own practice when reflecting on how others achieve the same goal with a completely different approach are endlessly fascinating and produced animated discussions long into the night.

This is the real value of these meetings, frustrating as the difficulty communicating at times can be. I learnt a lot. The downsides are few, but for this correspondent there were times I despaired for a field where many of our leaders are keen to make the point that randomised trials of HBOT are not really possible. Why? Because when you know something works, you simply cannot ethically withhold the treatment from those who are really sick. I guess they have not caught up with the use of oxygen in resuscitation yet.¹

Overall, the meeting was a credit to Jorge Pisarello, Nina Subbotina, Gustavo Mauvecin and the team behind them. Wonderful hosts in all things, they put on a fascinating programme and a gala dinner memorable for great food, great wine and a lot of spirited dancing. The next chance to experience this truly international meeting will come in Belgrade in 2017 under the Presidency of Miodrag Zarić. More of that news in our next ICHM newsletter, but you should start planning your attendance now.

References

Weston C. Oxygen therapy in acute myocardial infarction – too much of a good thing? [editorial]. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev*. 2010 June 16;2011:ED000006.

Committee 2014 to 2017:

President: Miodrag Zarić (newly elected in BA), Serbia

Executive Director: Alessandro Marroni, Italy

Secretary: Michael Bennett, Australia