



# ECHSA

EUROPEAN CONGENITAL HEART SURGEONS ASSOCIATION

## Letter from the President of ECHSA to Members

Dear ECHSA Members and friends,

First, I do hope that all of you and your families have remained healthy, that you are over the worst of the pandemic, and that you have also managed some relaxing vacation time, in preparation for the many challenges still ahead!

Through this turmoil, the ECHSA leadership has continued its efforts in support of our Association's goals, and therefore, I would like to update you on several important issues and initiatives.

1) **Joint CHSS – ECHSA Meeting.** Our Joint ECHSA-CHSS Meeting, scheduled to take place in Boston in October, with a great scientific program, will be a **virtual meeting**, allowing live discussions. The following announcement is posted on the CHSS and the ECHSA website:

*“Due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of creating the safest learning experience, this year’s CHSS & ECHSA Joint Annual Meeting program that was to take place in person October 22-24, 2020, at the Four Seasons in Boston, MA, will now be held virtually. In the coming weeks you will receive additional information on the meeting, including registration and programmatic details. The CHSS & ECHSA is excited to offer this virtual meeting and hopes you will be able to join us. Thank you for your understanding.”*

2) **Warsaw Symposium.** Our special ECHSA Symposium, which had been planned for the end of June in Warsaw, hosted by Bohdan Maruszewski and honoring his contributions upon his retirement, has been postponed for **late November 2020**. We still hope that we will be able to meet in celebration in Warsaw, but we also recognize that the possible emergence of a major second wave of COVID-19 infection may force us to reassess the situation in early fall.

3) **COVID-19 pandemic-related initiatives.** As you know from previous communications, ECHSA, in collaboration with the World Society and the CHSS, has worked on the creation and distribution of a **survey** to collect information on the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on congenital heart surgery.

This survey's results have been analyzed and a relevant paper was submitted to and accepted for publication in our World Journal for Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgery. In addition, separate abstracts on the impact of the pandemic on



congenital cardiac centers in Europe and in the rest of the world will be presented at the Joint CHSS-ECHSA meeting in October.

A follow-up survey will be distributed soon.

4) **Research Committee and Multi-Institutional Studies.** As we all know, the conduct of Multi-Institutional Clinical Studies has been a major pillar of our scientific activity. Since our June Meeting in Warsaw was cancelled, Vladimir Vida, our Research Committee Secretary, organized a virtual meeting of the Research Committee reviewing the current status of all our ECHSA Multi-Institutional Studies, in collaboration with the relevant PIs. The minutes of the meeting and an up-to-date summary of our Multi-Institutional studies [can be found here](#).

5) **Activities of the ECHSA Congenital Database.** The other major scientific pillar of ECHSA is our ECHSA Congenital Database. The Database Committee, chaired by Bohdan Maruszewski, has met virtually ([minutes of the teleconference can be found here](#)). An upcoming exciting new ECHSA Congenital Database Newsletter, Edited by Claudia Herbst, will provide a comprehensive update to all. Older newsletters can be found here ([ECDB Newsletter #1](#)) ([ECDB Newsletter #2](#)).

Of the various valuable Database-related projects and studies, there are two particularly important ones:

- a) **Interventional Cardiology Module-Collaboration with AEPC.** The development of a facility to allow interventional cardiology data to be entered in our Database is progressing extremely well in close collaboration with the AEPC. This effort will soon lead to our Database being the only Congenital Database in the world which includes both surgical and cardiology Data!
- b) **Use of Artificial Intelligence in Analysis of Congenital Heart Surgery Data - Collaboration with MIT.** I am also very excited to report that great progress has been achieved in our ECHSA Database cooperative project with Professor Dimitris Bertsimas, Director of the Department of Operations Research at MIT, on using non-linear methodology based on Machine Learning and Artificial Intelligence to develop new objective risk models for congenital heart surgery. A user-friendly **risk calculator** based on these models has been developed and will be made available soon for our community to use. As you know, this initial work was accepted for presentation at the (cancelled) 100<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the AATS in Boston. The full paper has been submitted to the JTCVS, has received favorable reviews, and has been resubmitted with revisions.

In the meantime, based on this innovative technology, we have already developed powerful tools which will enable the Database to provide **custom benchmarking reports** to participating centers. These tools, already under testing, will yield reports which contain extremely valuable



**ECHSA**  
EUROPEAN CONGENITAL HEART SURGEONS ASSOCIATION

information to the centers regarding their areas of strength and areas of opportunity, and will be of major help in their quality improvement programs.

With this blossoming project developing in collaboration with one of the world's most prominent academic institutions, ECHSA is pioneering the application of these powerful technologies in congenital heart surgery! In the next few months, more related exciting developments are anticipated!

With warmest regards and wishes for good health and progress,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George E. Sarris, M.D." followed by a stylized flourish.

George Sarris  
ECHSA President