

1. A Brief Historical Review of International Exchanges in Medicine

By Jose Jimenez

International cultural exchanges are not new events and there has always been a communal and cross-border effort in the development of science. The manner of how these exchanges have taken place has been different, until reaching the present model of International Professional Associations and Congresses.

As far back as the Babylonian civilization, physicians were travelers spreading their knowledge for a fee and publishing medical texts. In the Hellenic civilization, learning and knowledge development were based on Schools in which foreign physicians and/or medical students mixed with the "locals". Some of these schools also promoted the itinerant physician (periodeute) who travelled with what today would be considered a "team" formed by assistants, students and midwives; this group not only treated patients but also gave lectures to the local students. One of the most famous medical schools was that of Cos, which was responsible for disseminating the teachings of Hippocrates recommending that the treatment of the sick individual should include not only the disease but should also take into account the environment.

The Roman civilization followed the Greek and for this reason, schools and books continued to be the primary vehicle to exchange knowledge, nationally and internationally. Galen (A.D. 130-200) was one of the most prolific writers of that time with more than 500 treatises but unfortunately, many of them perished during the fire of Rome in A.D. 191.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, there was a vacuum in the development of science as a whole. This was followed by the rise of the Islamic civilization, which expanded into the West by means of the invasion into Spain and Europe in 711AD leading to the establishment of the Caliphate of Cordoba in the IX century and, very soon, this city became the cultural centre of the West. This new environment produced great thinkers and physicians able to create schools, whose influence and knowledge expanded beyond the local frontiers. These physicians were: Avenzoar or Ibn-Zurh (Seville 1090-1162), Averroes or Ibn-ush (Cordoba, 1126-1198) as well as the Jewish Moses ben Maimon or Maimonides (Cordoba, 1135-1204). Unfortunately when the Almohads, a new extremist and fanatical Islamic sect, captured Cordoba in 1148, there was a cultural decline that forced Maimonides to leave Spain for Palestine and Egypt. During this similar period of time Avicenna, born in Persia in 980 AD, was able to influence international knowledge in the Eastern cities with his writings, namely The Book of Healing and The Canon of Medicine. The devolvement and exchange of scientific and medical knowledge during the next four to five centuries was slow and there was no significant events until Servetto (1511-33), Vesalius (1514-64) and Harvey (1578-1657).

The discovery of the New World stimulated the interest and study of Cosmography and Mathematics and for this reason in 1582, Felipe II of Spain founded the "Academia de Matematicas", which eventually became the Real Academia de Ciencias of Spain. The trend to separate "the knowledge of cause from that of philosophy" was the basis for the creation of The Solomon's House in England in the early XVII century, which in 1662-63 was given a Royal Charter under the new name of the Royal Society where theology and metaphysics were excluded from their transactions and, in addition, broke with the tradition of performing its scientific communication in Latin by allowing exchanges in any language and from different sources, thus facilitating international exchanges.

The "Academies" and/or "Societies" with a royal/national charter multiplied in Europe during the XVII and XVIII centuries and they became primary vehicle for cultural exchange; in the USA Franklin founded The American Philosophical Society in 1743. This model of Royal Societies/Academies as a means of national and international cultural exchange was the main medium for international interaction until the creation of more specialized Professional Associations in the XIX Century.

One of the earliest medical-related international conferences took place in Paris in 1851 to discuss Public Health. Later on, in 1909, The International Office for Public Health was established in Paris and this Office was absorbed first by the League of Nations and eventually by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948 (9).