

Editor's Page

Cardiovascular Research in Europe and in Greece

PANOS E. VARDAS

Department of Cardiology, Heraklion University Hospital, Crete, Greece



The annual congress of the European Society of Cardiology recently took place in Munich, Germany. This congress is undoubtedly the biggest annual scientific event in the field of cardiovascular diseases in Europe, and perhaps even world wide, given that the number of scientific presentations and the participation of industry were both unusually high.

This annual congress comprises the most important European forum for the presentation and discussion of the latest results of research – basic, applied and clinical – in cardiology. Our experience, at least from a major part of the research material presented, was positive. Fields of particular interest, such as preventive cardiology, molecular cardiology, cardiovascular imaging, cardiac electrophysiology and the functional assessment of coronary lesions, appear to be making great strides in Europe. Indeed, in some areas European research centres seem to be leading the way. That is a first impression.

However, despite this optimistic picture, anyone who looks for a planning chart, or a systematic, unified strategy for cardiovascular research in Europe is likely to be disappointed. It is easy to see that this is because cardiovascular research on our continent is developed mainly at a national level, with government funding for state institutions.

The major development centres are the state-run hospitals, some small and medium-sized national research institutes, and the pharmaceutical and medical device industries to the extent that these remain European.

In contrast, there is very little central funding from the European Union, just a small fraction of what is spent by the National Institute of Health in

the USA, while there is no centrally structured organisation for biomedical research. The lack of any material intergovernmental collaboration has inevitably led to fragmentation, with parallel research activities entailing increased cost and often producing a poorer result.

A similar situation prevails in Greece. Although the production of ideas and research protocols is flourishing, all our efforts depend on initiatives by hospital cardiologists and in particular those in university departments. In contrast, there is a noticeable lack of central national planning, of national funding, of specialised institutes, and there is no justified, long-term strategy.

It is, of course, an encouraging and optimistic sign that Greek cardiologists continue to hold a place among the top six European countries as far as research presentations are concerned. However, at the same time we must take a long hard look at the quality and usefulness of our research output, the conditions that are developing and the relevant financial aspects.

Focusing on the latter, it is easy to see that available annual research funding and national policy concerning cardiovascular research are extremely skimpy. In practice it is the hospitals of the National Health Foundation and the universities who underpin our efforts. Unfortunately, this is not enough. It is time to develop a Greek national strategy for the development of biomedicine in general and cardiovascular research in particular.

The dream of course, is for strategic research at both national and European level, working in harmony on the basis of a carefully thought out long-term plan.