

The Romanian Working Group on Echocardiography: past, present, and future

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The Working Group on Echocardiography (WGE) of the Romanian Society of Cardiology was formally founded in 1991. Activities related to echocardiography took place occasionally even before, as early as 1977, when a first symposium on echocardiography was held, while in 1982 a first course on cardiac ultrasound was organized in Bucharest.

Romania is among the first European countries to have introduced an accreditation system in 1991 for individuals performing echocardiography and was therefore part of the initial taskforce set to help developing the European Association of Echocardiography (EAE) certification system.

Our WGE currently has more than 230 active members, most of them cardiologists, and is lead by a President and a Secretary, elected for a 3-year term. It is one of the most active WGs of our Society having also the largest number of members.

One of the main purposes of our WGE has always been education. The regular annual meetings held in Bucharest since 1998 with international participation were very successful with many

hundreds of participants attending every time to listen to great speakers. Apart from that we also held regular echo courses run by national experts, always well attended.

Collaboration with the European Association of Echocardiography has been key for the success of our educational activities. Thus, the two EAE Teaching courses held in Bucharest (March 2007, and April 2010, directed by Alan Fraser and Pepe Zamorano, respectively, together with Carmen Ginhina and myself as local directors) have had a great success, attracting >400 participants each time. All the lectures of the 2010 course are freely available on the EAE website as educational material. We received a very positive feedback from participants who had the chance to listen lecturing and to see performing live scanning some of the best known European echocardiographers.

To encourage research, we have introduced in 2009 at the Romanian Society of Cardiology level a system of awards for authors able to publish original research in respected cardiology journals with impact factor (the level of the prize being related



Figure 1 Group of Romanian echocardiographers at the Romanian WGE poster in the International Echo Area at EuroEcho 2010, Copenhagen.

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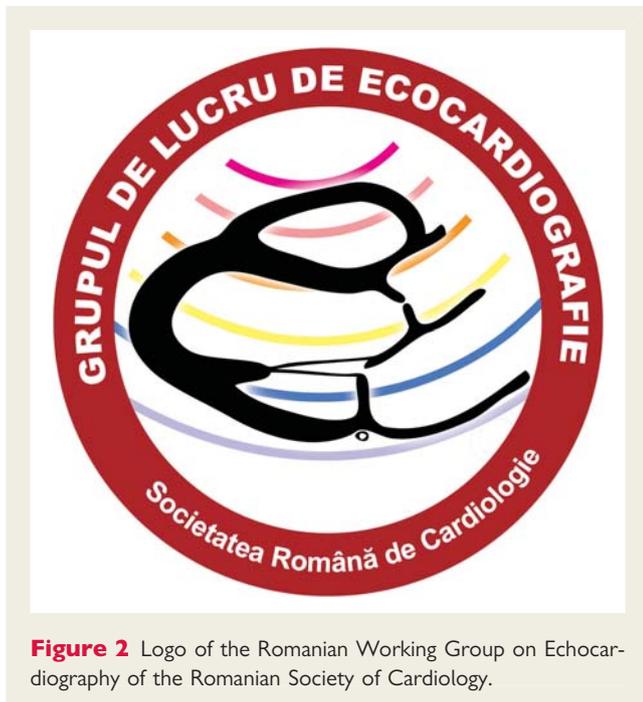


Figure 2 Logo of the Romanian Working Group on Echocardiography of the Romanian Society of Cardiology.

to the impact factor of the journal). We have also introduced at the same time a Young Investigator Award (YIA) competition during our annual National Congress, and a 1-year Research fellowship, both for cardiologists younger than 35, with rules similar to those applied at the EAE level.

Remarkably, most of the prizes awarded so far for original cardiology publications went to echocardiography papers. During the last YIA competition, all the six finalists presented studies in the field of echocardiography, while both Romanian Society of Cardiology research fellowships awarded so far were also for echocardiography projects.

At European level, our WGE has been in recent years among the top five countries in terms of EAE members. The number of original abstracts coming from Romania accepted for presentation during Euroecho has increased steadily while the number of

Romanian Faculty members at the congress has also increased significantly along recent years, including young outstanding members of our WG lecturing during Euroecho. Our WGE had the opportunity to organize five DICE sessions during the last 11 editions of Euroecho, a chance for many young colleagues to present interesting cases at a large European meeting. Moreover, we are proud of our two young colleagues who were awarded EAE Research grants in 2009 and 2010.

We have started the translation of EAE recommendation papers, which are published in the *Romanian Heart Journal*. In 2009 the first Romanian echo laboratory received European accreditation from the EAE, followed last December by a second one.

The efforts spent for educational activities and for encouraging research at the level of our WGE were rewarding. Not everything goes smoothly and the financial problems limit to a large extent the access to latest technology. However, even this can sometimes be overcome by applications for infrastructure research grants and there are a few echo laboratories in Romania equipped with state-of-the-art research technology. In addition, the young generation is always keen to learn and willing to travel to a centre where proper education and research opportunities are offered.

I could not end a presentation about the Romanian WGE without thanking all the former leaders of our WGE whose contribution to these developments was outstanding: Eduard Apetrei who had a major role in introducing echocardiography in Romania, Ioan Mircea Coman, and Carmen Gînghină as Presidents, and also to Dragos Cozma, the current Secretary of our WGE, for his support.

I am proud of the progress made by my young colleagues both in teaching and in research. It is always a pleasure to work with them in the laboratory, to learn from their questions, and to become contaminated by their enthusiasm. Seeing them at work I strongly believe in the future of Romanian echocardiography and I am sure our WGE will further develop.

The lesson learned during these years at the leadership of our WGE is that cooperation with bright European colleagues at the EAE level is the best approach, helping us grow together.