

# Organization of the 43rd European Congress of Cytology in the SARS–CoV-2 pandemic period: A report

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The 43rd European Congress of Cytology in Wrocław, Poland, was held as a hybrid meeting in the Fall of 2021. After nearly 2 years without in-person cytology conferences, the 43rd Congress represents 1 of the first major international scientific meetings to occur during the severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus 2 pandemic. Since March 2020, the pandemic situation substantially modified the organization of scientific meetings because of both domestic and international travel restrictions, new health standards, and concern among participants, resulting in new alternative forms of virtual conferencing. **Cancer (Cancer Cytopathol) 2022;130:000-000. Cancer Cytopathol 2022;0:1-3.** © 2022 American Cancer Society.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Originally, before the development of the severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic, the 43rd European Congress of Cytology (43rd ECC) had been scheduled to take place in October 2020; however, with continual escalation of the pandemic, the organizers of this popular international cytology meeting were forced to postpone the conference until 2021. The European Federation of Cytology Societies arranged for the Polish Society of Pathologists to organize the 43rd ECC in October 2021 and nominated Professor Jerzy Klijanienko as president and professors Michał Jeleń, Dr. Paweł Gajdzis, and Andrzej Marszałek as vice presidents.<sup>1,2</sup> The city of Wrocław, Poland, was selected by the team as the meeting place.

Conditions associated with the pandemic obliged the Congress organizers to change the standard meeting procedures, including considerations related to specific vaccination conditions among various participant countries both within and outside the European Union. To overcome these issues, it was decided that the ECC would be organized as a hybrid event, including both in-person as well as virtual participation so that more delegates would be able to take part in the Congress. Conversely, the proposed hybrid format would have some disadvantages, including increased costs for the event and limitations on face-to-face contact among the usually diverse group of participants. Despite the hybrid structure of the 43rd ECC, the meeting was able to attract supporting corporate sponsors who participated through special exhibitor sections. Fortunately, the 43rd ECC was also generously supported by the Mayor of the city of Wrocław, Mr. Jacek Sutryk, as well as the Minister of Education and Science, Professor Przemysław Czarnek.

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The exceptional sanitary conditions caused severe acute respiratory syndrome-coronavirus 2 complicated the organization of the 43rd European Congress of Cytology. The authors submitted a report on these challenges and difficulties in such organization.

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## 2. A SUCCESSFUL 43RD ECC

The 43rd ECC was held in Poland on October 3 to 6, 2021, at the Wrocław Congress Center, which is currently included on the UNESCO list, is located in the exhibition complex built in 1913 by the famous German architect Max Berg. The 43rd ECC included an impressive 132 different scientific sessions, consisting of 5 keynote lectures, 21 companion meetings, 29 symposiums, 29 workshops, 12 slide seminars, 3 open papers sessions, and 1 International Academy of Cytology examination. There were over 600 participants from 51 countries and 5 continents, reflecting the truly worldwide participation of the cytology community. The Congress delegates included 76 session chairs as well as 213 on-site participants and 345 who participated virtually in the meeting. Approximately 90% of the Congress participants were from Europe.

Keynote speakers at the 43rd ECC were: Dr. Gaelle Pierron (Somatic Genetic Unit Deputy, Genetic Department, Curie Institute, Paris, France), with the lecture “Genomic Markers in Sarcomas in Daily Practice—From Molecular Diagnosis to Therapeutic Target”; Professor Catherine Cuschieri (Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom), with the lecture “HPV Primary Screening Pathways; Negotiating the International Landscape”; Professor Richard J. Cote (Washington University, St Louis, Missouri), who presented “Circulating Tumor Cell Capture, Interrogation, Imaging, Automated Analysis, and Culture: New Tools and Biologic Insights”; Professor Adel K. El-Naggar (The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Houston, Texas), discussing “Diagnosis and Genomics of Salivary Gland Neoplasms: MD Anderson Perspectives”; and Professor William C. Faquin (Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts), presenting “Advances in the Diagnosis and Treatment of Adenoid Cystic Carcinoma and Other Salivary Gland Cancers.”

The companion meetings were organized by representatives from a diverse international group of countries, including China, Croatia and Greece, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the European Advisory Committee of Cytotechnology, Euro-Asia, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Lower Silesia, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Sweden, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States (American Society of Cytopathology). Approximately 430 attendees participated either on-site or online in 29 different workshops.

The success of the 43rd ECC is reflected in the overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the general excellence of the programs, the superb quality of lectures by an international and diverse group of speakers, and cutting edge scientific topics. In addition, Congress participants appreciated the nearly flawless and innovative technological aspects, which made the hybrid event possible. Among the most popular topics at the ECC sessions were salivary gland cytology; updates related to new cytology classifications, including the Milan and Paris systems; immunocytochemistry; cervical cancer screening; human papillomavirus testing and implications for diagnosis; serous fluid cytology; atypia in pancreatic neoplasia; and the World Health Organization classification for soft tissue cytology.

## 3. CONCLUSIONS

In response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the 43rd ECC was held as a hybrid event, and it is clear from its great success that hybrid conferences were there to stay! Several key points about hybrid events can be summarized as follows:

1. The *hybrid format* permits a greater number of both speakers and participants. The hybrid format essentially creates 2 congresses in 1—a traditional in-person venue and a virtual format made possible by high-quality technical support contact.
2. *Flexibility and adaptation of the program content* results in a broad range of material for both in-person and virtual viewing. In addition, the entire content of the meeting was recorded, providing all participants with the option to view any of the material at a future convenient time.
3. *Safety* during the Congress, which, in addition to standard procedures (masks, sanitizers, and appropriate social distancing during sessions), included the possibility of taking a COVID-19 test, which significantly influenced the sense of safety among participants as well as providing reassurance for participants returning to their homes in different countries of the world.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES**

The authors made no disclosures.

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