

More than 10,000 hematologists connect and learn in Madrid

EHA congress, the key gathering of hematologists in Europe took place in Madrid in June, bringing 10,600 specialists in this essential field of medicine in the EHA congress. We talked to the team from the European Hematology Association responsible for organizing this congress and got to know a bit more...



Big numbers: the spaces used

- Exhibition area & catering: Hall 7 - 9,500 sqm (gross)
- Poster area: Hall 7 – 4,200 sqm (gross)
- Constructed session halls and networking area: Hall 9 in full, which included four session rooms (3,000 pax, 1,300 pax, 1,100 pax, and 800 pax, all theatre style)
- Registration area and 2nd largest constructed session room: Hall 5 (4,500 sqm)
- All remaining session rooms occupied the entire North Convention Center of IFEMA, with halls from 70 to 480 seats in theater style, totaling another 14 session rooms.

The objectives of the event: sharing knowledge...

“Our congress has two objectives: sharing knowledge and connecting with other hematology professionals. I mean sharing knowledge in a broad sense, both educating people on specific topics and sharing the latest knowledge about hematology in general” says Rik Craenmehr, Manager Congress & Events of EHA, stressing the importance of adapting contents to a diverse public: “we have attendees with very different levels of experience and maturities in this field”. To cater for those specific needs, the congress offers no less than 200 sessions, with, generally 12 tracks in parallel. The congress also managed to get 2.500 abstracts, ensuring a very strong level and variety of knowledge.

Is this extreme personalization of content? According to Rik, this is no luxury, just adaptation to a varied sector. This area of medicine “includes a wide range of different diseases, so we need to cover a lot of specific content”, to serve both to different levels of maturities, and different medical issues.

... and connecting people. The second objective is enabling hematology professionals to meet people from various countries and disciplines. The event is a focus point for all these people to come together. And the congress format is conceived precisely to maximize networking, with a few initiatives:



A great networking event: The Grooves



Stay healthy, be wide awake, and connect with other attendees in a group activity: the EHA Run takes place during this congress every year. This year: 330 runners.

PICK YOUR CHOICE! NO LESS THAN 200 SESSIONS, WITH, GENERALLY 12 TRACKS IN PARALLEL

- A poster reception, in which close to 2,000 people gather to discuss posters with their authors, including a poster walk, or talking to presenters. This event lasts for 3 hours.
- A number of receptions for specific groups (early careers professionals, researchers...).
- A networking area: they decided to build a large area in which 500 cardboard seats were distributed as well as water points. “This was immensely popular” says Rik, observing how much people want to network. Cardboard chairs are easy to move and worked out perfectly. Creating the area and making it nice was quite an investment, but the area worked out very well.

The congress however does not include specific time slots for networking: the programme is so dense that there is not even an official lunch break or coffee breaks: the programme lasts the whole day, with just 15 minutes between sessions to let people go from one room to another, and people just decide when they wish to grab lunch, skipping one session.

Getting younger professionals involved. They are tomorrow's delegates, and getting the young on board is especially important. So besides the reception for early career professionals which we mentioned, the EHA has created a specific track after asking young practitioners to define which sessions are most interesting for them. They also organize some early career sessions in the congress (how to be published, how to write a research programme...). This specific programme was started in 2013 and is very important in the strategy of the association.

A SPECIFIC NETWORKING AREA WAS BUILT, INCLUDING 500 CARDBOARD SEATS WHICH COULD BE EASILY MOVED

A third objective is community building. "This congress enables us to meet many of our members, and national societies", says Rik. EHA has its own members, and is not a cluster of national societies. National societies have their relevance and activities, and EHA does not substitute them, rather means another layer of knowledge with a strong international focus. So the congress enables EHA to get people to feel part of the international hematology community, and to register as permanent members. As says Rik, a congress like this makes people feel more European, and part of a European community.



Good dynamics, despite uncertainties. Times are good! The event was attended by over 10,600 attendees, which meant the third year that it passed the 10,000 mark (a figure which excludes exhibitors and satellite organisers). Interestingly, a medical society with 4,000 members manages to gather close to 11,000 delegates, making it the second largest such congress worldwide. Its international dimension is shown in the fact that 65% of participants are European and 35% come from the rest of the world.

THE EVENT INCLUDED A RECEPTION AND A SPECIFIC TRACK FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

So the congress tends to be growing. The future is hard to predict, due to uncertainties about regulation and the economic situation, but Rik sees no effect yet of the increasingly restrictive pharma code of conduct: the congress is highly scientific and meets compliance standards with no problem. They do not observe doctors not coming or companies not supporting the event as a consequence of the pharma compliance rules.





New ways of transmitting knowledge: small is beautiful, but limited. For such a large congress, plenary-type sessions are still the norm, consisting of lecture and discussion with a large crowd of 500-2,000 professionals. "One-to-one interaction is difficult in a 500 or 800", says Rik. The EHA however opened the "meet the experts" sessions to larger audiences (they started with 50 people, they now can have up to 150 participants), in which the expert speaks for 15 minutes, followed by a discussion. But small sessions can not be the norm: "we have 10,000 people, we don't want to have too many sessions which only a few people can attend", says Rik. The congress is where you get your general update on how science is going, and if you are looking for very specialized content, the EHA offers smaller meetings for 50-150 people which enable much interactivity.

Generating content. A large part of the congress is being recorded, and is available in the EHA's online learning center. "We generate 180 hours of webcast, that is freely accessible to congress delegates and members after the congress".

IN "MEET THE EXPERTS": UP TO 150 PARTICIPANTS GET A EXPERT TALK, FOLLOWED BY A DISCUSSION

The EHA organizes internally all the scientific programme, with committees covering each of the important fields of knowledge, and works with a PCO for logistics and production. Logistics is essential for such a large congress: "providing hotel accommodation is still very important because we have a large number of groups and need many rooms, so we need to help groups get the blocks they need, especially since in Europe there are not many very large hotels. The association wants to still be involved in hotel bookings, to avoid surges in prices which would happen when such a large congress comes to town.

A great experience. "We had a very good experience in Madrid. It was our first time in this city, which is always exciting as well as challenging in terms of organisation. Everything worked out very well". One frequent headache was successfully managed: "Wi-fi is always a challenge and we were very happy with how IFEMA worked with our team to make sure it functioned properly, so we had no problem. General logistics was also very efficient", says Rik.

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CSR: "We are trying to reduce our footprint and amount of paper and waste. We work with recycled material for the delegates bags. For lunch, to avoid waste, we do not have ready made packets but rather delegates can select what they want with tickets, reducing waste as delegates choose precisely what they want to eat. We have fewer flyers, and are doing things more digitally".