The European Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (EFCC), the European Union of Medical Specialists - Specialist Section and Board of Medical Biopathology (UEMS-MBS&B) and Jornadas Internacionais da Qualidade em Laboratórios de Análises Clínicas (JIQLAC) organized the First European Joint Congress of EFCC and UEMS in association with the 1st Portuguese Joint Congress of Laboratory Medicine, entitled “Laboratory Medicine in Healthcare”.

This conference was historical in many ways. It was the very first European conference since EFCC was established in 2007 after the merger of FESC and EC into one European Federation. This was also the first joint conference with UEMS which paves the path to further and stronger collaboration between EFCC and the European organization of medical specialists. This event was also the first conference of the Portuguese JIQLAC. This prime European event of the profession aimed not only to be the first in many ways but also to be “different” by having sessions and speakers focusing on clinically oriented topics that highlighted the importance of the interface between clinical and laboratory medicine. This aim was reflected in the conference slogan as well: “Laboratory Medicine at the Clinical Interface”.

Why did we choose this slogan, what was our thinking behind organizing this event? To answer this question we need to look back and reflect on the state of the art and the future challenges of laboratory medicine.

Medical laboratories play a vital role in modern health care, and qualified specialists in Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine are essential for the provision of high-quality pre-analytical, analytical and consultative services. Laboratory medicine has undergone major transformations during the last decade. Ongoing technological developments have considerably improved the productivity of clinical laboratories. Information on laboratory services is globally available, and clinical laboratories face international competition and constant pressure to reduce costs. In response to these challenges business models have been developed and implemented that increase efficiency and control cost increases by forming alliances and networks, consolidating, integrating or outsourcing services. However these mostly economically-driven initiatives have the potential to distance laboratories from their clinical users and from their real roles of providing knowledge and consultative services related to the use of in vitro diagnostics.

There is growing gap between the science and the art of every day clinical practice. Biomedical sciences and their innovations coming from translational research are supposed to form a bridge between the two. We face the dehumanizing effect of medical care: diseases are being defined at molecular and cellular level. Curative medicine is being replaced by preventive care and predictive medicine. The advancements of IT communications turned laboratories into high turn-over information and data centres and doctors demand faster and faster services for rapid decision-making. These revolutionary developments in technology not only present new challenges for better workflow management but also provide great opportunities to convert laboratories into intelligence and knowledge centres.

To achieve that, measuring the clinical and economic impact of laboratory practice and understanding testing-related outcomes are also key focus areas especially for governments and health care funding agencies. However, assessing clinical outcomes and value in relation to laboratory diagnostics is very difficult. In addition to solving diagnostic problems, clinical laboratories are more and more involved in assisting medical decision-making on the appropriate use of therapeutic interventions. Key objectives for the future therefore remain to
demonstrate the importance of Laboratory Medicine in the provision of effective health care. To that end the profession needs to provide an interface between clinical and laboratory medicine and should be actively engaged in the development and dissemination of the results of high quality translational research and evidence-based medicine. Clinical audits and proactive discussions between clinical and laboratory medicine will contribute to the rational utilization of diagnostic services and will improve the quality, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of health care.

Undoubtedly all these issues raise considerable challenges for the profession and the medical educators of the future. To meet these challenges, clinical pathologists should redirect their thinking and engage in translational research and develop tools that enable measuring and monitoring the clinical value and impact of their services. This should be reflected in the scope and content of specialist training as well. The core curriculum and competency of clinical pathologists should be revised and should focus on approaches and skills that provide complementary knowledge services related to diagnostic testing.

This conference aimed to address these needs and tried to form a bridge between basic and applied laboratory sciences and clinical decision making by providing educational sessions, state of the art lectures delivered both by laboratory professionals and clinicians, “Pros and Cons” sessions that presented opposing views on contradictory topics and which generated vivid professional debates, and interactive case discussions with participants’ voting.

The conference was attended by 1220 participants of whom 40% were from other countries all over Europe and beyond. One hundred and one speakers delivered the oral sessions and 202 posters/oral communications were presented at 4 pre-congress courses, 3 plenary sessions, 19 clinical sessions and 6 manufacturers’ symposia. The conference enjoyed the generous support of 39 companies. On the last day the 2nd BioRad-EFCC Symposium and videoconference was presented in tandem with the Czech Republic on quality management in laboratory medicine.

The scientific program was of high professional standards and run in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The attendance rate of sessions was impressively high with a lot of interaction and discussion. The scientific program in itself proved that laboratory medicine is a clinical profession and we can act as valuable partners of clinicians. For EFCC and UEMS it was a very important and historical moment as this was the first collaborative project of the two organizations which demonstrated that the profession - medical and non-medical - is united at scientific, professional and collegial level.

These were very important messages to get across in Europe. We thank all colleagues and the local and international organizing and scientific committees as well as the professional conference organizers and translators for an excellent conference that enabled us to discuss and communicate these issues in Lisbon to a large and enthusiastic audience.

We look forward to the 2nd EFCC-UEMS Conference in 2012 in Europe!

Prof. Andrea Rita Horvath    Prof Vic Blaton    Prof. Sverre Sandberg
EFCC President                 EFCC Past President  Chair of Scientific Committee
EFCC wishes to acknowledge and thank the efforts of all individuals listed below, who have contributed to the success of this event:

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