NEW MAN AT THE HELM

Interview with the ISH President Maciej Tomaszewski

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After a calamitous start to 2020 around the world one could wonder if (to paraphrase Humphrey Bogart): the problems (of the ISH) don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world. For members of ISH, however, hypertension is a daily consideration and perhaps more tangible than a virus. An interview with the new president of ISH, Maciej Tomaszewski, probed what he saw as the opportunities and threats to ISH as a result of COVID-19, *the raison d'être* of ISH and if this should be amended, and how the Society might evolve under his stewardship.

Maciej acknowledges that the world has changed enormously. His vision at the time of his election has been turned on its head by the financial and logistical changes wrought by the pandemic: "ideas that have been crystallising in my mind since my election have now to align with the top priority – making sure that the Society adapts to the new reality post-COVID-19 pandemic." Safeguarding the financial security of ISH was always important but has become even more prominent. He accepts that funding from traditional sources will continue to decrease and new avenues will need to be explored, for example funding through the website and targeted campaigns in social media are alternatives he would like the Society to explore. It seems to Maciej that academic societies need to become more outgoing and visible, in the way that the American Heart Association now figures in the consciousness of many Americans.

In the past, as well as being a prime objective of ISH, seminars and conferences to disseminate and teach were an important source of funding. It is

not yet clear how far traditional conferences will return in the medium-term future, but face-to-face meetings are currently not possible. The new president indicated that he would like to see the biennial international meeting of ISH continue in traditional format, but smaller regional meetings and seminars of 30 or so participants might not be able to survive in the pre-COVID format. He would "definitely consider transforming the bulk of our educational activities into a cheaper and safer internet-based mode."

When asked what he saw as the main function of ISH in the future he replied: "It is to exert the influence at the local, national and global scale to achieve our mission – reducing the burden of high blood pressure." In response to the observation that the Society did not appear to be doing well in reducing the prevalence, and increasing the treatment of hypertension, Maciej said the Society had limited assets and resources but can have influence through its publications and the standing of its members. He also pointed out the positive benefits of May Measurement Month (MMM) in raising awareness. Furthermore, he thinks his support for the alliance of the Society with PATH Coalition for Access to NCD Medications to improve access to affordable blood-pressure-lowering drugs, is an important way to reach the Society's objectives. At a local level, getting governments to change their policies on blood-pressure control was perhaps best achieved by ISH supporting local societies to influence individual national policies, he opined.

The new president agreed that members needed to see some tangible benefits to themselves or their countries. He said he is prepared to consider ideas from all ISH members, provided they align with the Society's vision – and are affordable. In the past, Maciej had been closely involved with the New Investigators and when asked if these people might be a source of change, he pointed out his support for the "New Blood" campaign (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y6dvQnUmdjo>) "to recruit new ambitious, talented, and dedicated people to re-invigorate the ISH leadership." He especially welcomed greater representation from low and middle-income countries, as this could make the Society more responsive to members' ambitions. When asked if he was concerned his "New Blood" campaign might upset the "Old Blood", he replied: "All organisations need to evolve and refresh and a combination of experience and the enthusiasm and vigour of younger members is the blend we should be aiming for. I would like to think I am naturally courageous and decisive. This should help to make difficult choices and decisions in the best interest of the Society."

Should ISH be involved in producing universal hypertension guidelines to replace the local guidelines? Writing guidelines is a key mission for many learned Societies, said Maciej. Unified guidelines would be more powerful, but the organisations that have regularly developed guidelines to underpin their portfolio of activities might be resistant. He saw that the best way forward might be to partner with these organisations in releasing widely endorsed position papers on controversial aspects of hypertension management. However, Maciej agreed that the idea of one global policy that regulates all aspects

of hypertension management is a very attractive one but "logistically and politically extremely difficult". Hence, almost a *"Mission Impossible"*.

When asked how he envisaged he could integrate the onerous task of the position of president with his research, teaching, clinical and administrative obligations, Maciej replied that he is a good manager of time. His years on the ISH Council have provided good experience at coordinating the Society's needs with academic commitments, he continued. It is likely he will require reliable support from his Executive Committee and his plan was "to delegate wisely; there will be a very clear division of responsibilities within the new ISH leadership. Indeed, everyone needs to know exactly what is expected of them... I hope that the emphasis on fair distribution of responsibilities will be immediately visible in the new ISH leadership."

In view of the recent tumultuous events and the uncertainty that the future holds, it is perhaps not surprising that Maciej Tomaszewski is cautious in making firm statements on plans for ISH during his presidency. Some things do seem clear from this interview. The financial situation of ISH is of concern and new ways of keeping the Society solvent are required. Some of this might be through re-organisation of management, but it seems likely that the format of some scientific meetings will change, as will support for activities. Maciej's plan to recruit new, young, ambitious, talented, and dedicated scientists to re-invigorate the ISH leadership, however, gives hope for the future and the longevity of the Society. Time will tell!

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