

Navigating in Bad Weather

(Closing Speech of the 2020 SAC Academic Ceremony)

Navegación con mal tiempo

(Discurso de cierre del acto académico 2020)

Authorities of the Argentine Society of Cardiology, the Argentine Foundation of Cardiology, and the Argentine Journal of Cardiology

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, relatives and friends

It is an honor and a great privilege to address you, as I did a year ago when I assumed the presidency of the Argentine Society of Cardiology, a role that is coming to an end.

As redundant as it may seem, I would like to say that 2020 has been one of the most difficult years at all levels experienced in the past century, and the SAC is no exception.

On the opening speech for my presidency last December, not even in the most delirious nightmare had I dreamed of the formidable challenge that fate had in store for me.

In March, we were overcome by a tremendous and unexpected reality for which we were not prepared: the pandemic broke out in our country like a tsunami.

The SAC had to leave its home and virtualize all administrative activities in a few days, without solution of continuity or disorder, and everything ran smoothly and quickly.

At the same time, online classes were made available for the courses; we managed to organize them in one week because the necessary resources and platforms had already been hired. To our surprise, far from desertion, online seats were filled with more registration requests.

In those days, and due to the great crisis, the SAC saw the urgent, and probably historic, need to assume leadership in cardiovascular health policies.

Because of the serious health situation and the need for containment, mitigation and recomposition of resources, the SAC cooperated promptly and decisively with the measures taken by the authorities.

However, we immediately noticed a significant collateral damage, because cardiovascular problems were being neglected, and therefore morbidity and mortality were increasing.

That situation became our main purpose of action and thus, a crisis committee was created, position papers were prepared, and collaborative work with the National Ministry of Health and the media was carried out to spread the message and include it in the health action plan.

In addition, agreements were reached with similar national and international scientific societies, enhancing communication to the society in general.

At present, after the first peak of the disease, we are devoted to recovering programs, networks, and all kinds of future measures to face the new reality, trying to make up for lost ground, and foreseeing the second wave.

However, every crisis leaves positive legacies; in our case, one of them was a true revolution in the scientific-educational aspect.

Expanded, improved online courses, large increase in social networks, and a renewed and interactive SAC website were the pillars of this development. A total of 65 webinars were broadcasted with more than 33,000 participants.

The Councils had an outstanding activity through Zoom and Webex, doubling their usual meetings and the number of participants.

SAC PAÍS regional districts were included in the central SAC as never before, and conferences and meetings were held with more than five thousand participants. But most importantly, true federalization and self-sustainability of the regional districts was accomplished, one of the dreamed strategic objectives of our Society, considered one of our greatest achievements this year.

In addition, there was a lot of research activity: all ongoing registries continued. The INTERASPIRE registry was launched, and the RACCOVID registry was created, analyzing cardiac complications of COVID-19 in 2,723 patients throughout the country, whose data are in final process.

New studies were also added, such as those of mechanical circulatory support, the RADAC registry, the ARGEN CCV (cardiovascular surgery) –added to the ARGEN IC and ARGEN IAM registries–, and the pulmonary hypertension registry, among others.

The National Guidelines for Myocardial Infarction with the Ministry of Health, and the Recommendations for the Management of Heart Failure were both published with the Argentine Federation of Cardiology (FAC).

In the international arena, the SAC worked cooperatively in meetings, educational programs, health campaigns, roadmaps, publications, and virtual congresses.

Our partners were the World Heart Federation, the Inter-American and the South American Societ-

ies of Cardiology, the European Society of Cardiology, the American College of Cardiology, and the American Heart Association. Of course, we participated in the Spanish, Mexican and Latin American congresses that were held.

The Argentine Congress of Cardiology and the Congress of Echocardiography and Cardiovascular Imaging were held together, and it is worth mentioning that its transformation to a fully virtual format, reformulated and organized in three months, was a huge challenge and an enormous effort.

Strenuous efforts were made to keep up with the historical levels, both in terms of quality and number of academic offerings; all the features that positioned it as a leader among Spanish-speaking congresses were met.

The usual organization including conferences and round tables with the participation of national and international guests was maintained, as well as joint meetings with scientific societies from all over the world.

A total of 477 original contributions were submitted, and the traditional research awards were granted. The structures of both the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as the regular meetings with districts and other areas, were carried out normally.

A major commercial exhibition took place, with strong support from the industry.

The congress was a resounding success, both in terms of technical and academic content and also due to the number of participants.

Regarding the economic aspect, a collapse due to the pandemic was foreseen last year in an already severely damaged country. Faced with this ominous panorama, austerity measures were taken, but without resigning any of the usual operating resources or planned investments.

A successful trade policy for our educational and academic projects and the significant income from the congress allowed us to reach the end of term with solid assets and with an important surplus, which includes the payment of the Rural Society venue for the 2021 Congress.

But, most importantly, perhaps, was that the mass of the society increased by 14% and that the contribution of genuine resources –such as the income from members and the product from educational material– practically covered the operational basis of our Society throughout this year. One more step in the projected path of independence and self-sustainability, a long-awaited wish.

As final thoughts for this incredibly difficult year, I could say that the crisis has encouraged the development of resources, skills and innovative attitudes. Geographical, cultural and temporal boundaries have been brought down. Prejudices, fears and complexes have been reduced: the whole environment is more transversal and cooperative.

There has been a reevaluation of the medical profession and health teams in the society in general. Teamwork and interaction with other scientific societies and health authorities to achieve synergic action have also been deepened. We have learned about resilience, sacrifice, effort, and solidarity.

As way of conclusion, a few words on a strictly personal note: this presidency was very different from the one I dreamed of. It was rough, hard, full of uncertainty and unknown challenges. I had to adapt to previously unfamiliar resources, and to long meetings, every day, in front of a screen, sometimes with a lot of participants.

Attrition was significant, and I had to overcome human fears in the context of a pandemic where the disease was always lurking to interrupt any personal project.

Traditional celebrations, pleasant social events and trips were absent, but were more than replaced by the satisfaction of fulfilling the responsibility I had been honored with.

When rereading my presidential project set out exactly one year ago, I can proudly conclude that all the objectives listed there were achieved.

Finally, I would like to express my deepest thanks to all those who accompanied me in my presidential term, doctors and staff who offered me their commitment, collaboration, efficiency, and ability to successfully complete this period.

I also thank God, and my dear family: Liliana, my wife, and my children Cecilia, Joaquín and Pilar, for their continuous and essential support. Without you all, nothing would have been possible.

I wish a huge success for the next presidential term, which is already guaranteed due to their clarity of mind and energy in their hearts to carry out the project of our Society.

Thank you very much, and farewell.

José Luis Navarro Estrada

President of the Argentine Society of Cardiology