

# REPORT OF THE 10<sup>TH</sup> EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON PAEDIATRIC COCHLEAR IMPLANTATION (ESPCI) ATHENS, GREECE, 12–15 MAY, 2011

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About 900 participants attended the 10<sup>th</sup> European symposium on cochlear implantation in children which took place from 12 to 15 May, 2011, in Athens, Greece. Although mainly a continental conference, scientists also came from both Americas, Asia and Africa. The symposium coincided with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first single-channel cochlear implant in 1961.

The organizing committee, under the presidency of Prof. Thomas Nikolopoulos, was faced with the challenge of organizing 37 round tables, 12 invited lectures, 4 discussion panels, 395 oral presentations and 94 posters.

The opening ceremony featured a lecture by Prof. Gerard O'Donoghue from the United Kingdom on the history of cochlear implants, their application to the treatment of deafness in children, and their potential future development. The opening ceremony had a combined Polish and Greek flavour, with Prof. Henryk Skarzynski, president of the 9<sup>th</sup> ESPCI in 2009, passing a symbolic chain to Prof. Nikolopoulos, signifying the honor of organizing this international meeting. A charming element of the opening ceremony was the presence of a group of cochlear implant users from several countries, all with nearly 20 years of CI experience. One of them was Polish, a patient of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing, who fluently speaks both Polish and English.

On the first day there were three satellite symposia, organized by leading cochlear implant companies. During two of the symposia, Prof. H. Skarzynski, from the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing in Warsaw, presented lectures at the invitation of the Med-El Company from Austria and the Cochlear Company from Australia. He presented the latest achievements of the Institute in the field of pediatric cochlear implant treatment. One is the use, for the first time, of special CI electrodes and he gave the first international report of so-called deep electrode insertion, which preserves existing hearing. Particular interest was shown in a research project on a new SRA electrode for cochlear implants that can be used for the treatment of partial deafness in children.

The 4-day scientific program was divided into several parallel sessions. One popular session was hearing screening, and a widely discussed topic was how to extend screening to a children beginning their school education. In Poland, there is a universal newborn hearing screening, and the idea is to extend this to Polish children starting school and, in the future, to other European countries. Another point for discussion was the issue of ever-broader indications for cochlear implantation, which raises the expectations of many more patients, and this naturally leads to the question of how to develop new surgical techniques, new signal coding



From left: Prof. Thomas Nikolopoulos, Prof. Gerard O'Donoghue, and Prof. Henryk Skarzynski.



Prof. Henryk Skarzynski passes the symbolic chain of office to Prof. Thomas Nikolopoulos.

strategies, and new approaches to preserve existing hearing (the electric-acoustic approach to stimulation). Also popular was the topic of bilateral implantation – its indications, methods, range of rehabilitation and intra-operative imaging. A promising line of research is the genetic treatment of hypoacusia and regeneration in the organ of Corti using intra-labyrinthine delivery of drugs via a CI electrode. Much attention was given to ‘hearing preservation’ after CI, i.e. preserving low-frequency hearing in patients with ski-slope audiograms. The topic became almost the leitmotiv of the conference, with five round tables dedicated to the subject. Atraumaticity, depth of insertion, surgical techniques

and electrode characteristics were discussed. In one interesting piece of basic research, Prof. H-P. Zenner and Prof. O. Adunka reported potential mechanisms of damage to inner ear structures during implantation.

The scientific program included three workshops: on trends and developments in the field of hearing implants, on electrophysiological tests in audiology, and on problems in rehabilitating children after cochlear implantation.

The next, 11<sup>th</sup> European Symposium on Paediatric Cochlear Implantation will be held in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2013.