

Building a vision for the future of organ transplantation



The world is still reeling from the greatest health challenge in modern history. A challenge with a huge human toll. A challenge which exposed deficiencies in every health system across the globe and revealed our unpreparedness to deal with major disasters. The pandemic also had an indirect impact on the delivery of other health services, including organ transplantation, by concentrating personnel and resources on the task in hand. As such, the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be fully understood.

However, every cloud has a silver lining as the pandemic has brought communities and countries closer than ever. We demonstrated the immense power of collaboration that allowed the rapid development of disruptive solutions to a global challenge. We were pushed to innovate, to re-think how services were delivered, how interactions with patients were conducted, how we could deliver healthcare services remotely and in the face of adversity, all whilst maintaining patients' trust in a high-quality care.

Even in the midst of this global challenge, our field took a major leap in xeno-transplantation, organ perfusion and preservation technology, and has built the foundation for bioengineering the organs of the future. We worked ever closer with patients in establishing shared care as the fundamental principle of transplant medicine and removed barriers in access to what is now a global resource and field. Now, as we emerge from the aftermath of the pandemic, we have an opportunity to radically re-shape the delivery of organ transplant care and to ensure preparedness for future challenges. We need to learn from the challenges of recent years and press on with the innovative spirit characteristic of our field to push disruptive innovations and developments.

Against this background, the transplant community will gather in Athens for the 21st ESOT Congress to discuss, debate and identify the transplant strategies of the future.

Technology was an essential component of the pandemic response, and it is widely believed that the pandemic has accelerated the digitalisation of healthcare. So, there is little doubt that the future of transplantation will be technological in almost every aspect of clinical care and research. At this year's congress, we will discuss how to integrate these disruptive technologies in routine care, what the potential societal, ethical and individual patient impacts are and how we can ensure accessibility for every single one of our patients. As such, the opening plenary session will set the scene for what disruptive innovation may look like in the future, explore how technology can enhance the human aspect of transplant care and how it can help us build the trusted care that we aim to achieve. These are big challenges that can only be achieved through collaboration.

In true ESOT spirit, we will think outside the box to find the most innovative solutions to the organ shortage and explore the realm of bioengineering and artificial intelligence, manipulating the very nature of our being by reprogramming our blood groups or making use of genetically modified organs, transcending the boundaries of species.

Each topic will be explored further in state-of-the-art conversations and then debated and discussed in solution rooms and fishbowl sessions, where experts will interact with the audience in open conversations. It is this level of interaction and dialogue that this congress aims to promote, allowing every participant to consider how these advances can be implemented and improve their practice.

This year's programme is not only about the cutting-edge technologies or the innovative solutions coming out of the research labs. It is also about the day-to-day practice, the interdisciplinary interactions, and the ability to share best practices to improve access to transplantation and reduce inequities in care across Europe. We have listened to the feedback from ESOT members that the congress should enable such conversations about what may appear routine issues in parts of the continent but are still a challenge in others, such as organ donation, living donation, research and consent. A significant number of sessions are designed to be interactive (dare to ask, let's talk about it, solution rooms), and we count on every participant to share their challenges, successes and ideas to improve transplant care and learn from each other in the most collaborative way.

The ESOT Congress 2023 marks a unique moment in transplant history, placing the people in need of a transplant at its very heart. For the first time in the field of transplantation, the Honorary Congress Chair is a patient, demonstrating ESOT's commitment to patient-centric science and clinical care. Many of the sessions are designed to inform about best practice in shared decision making, how patients can help democratise healthcare, how we can work closely to reduce non-adherence and improve long-term follow-up and outcomes. These interactions will be reflected in the stories we will hear from patients and pioneers in the field.

In a world still facing many unknowns and crises, we will openly discuss challenging issues such as caring in times of crisis, migration, organ trade and explore ways to build resilience in our systems. We will conclude the congress on an aspirational note, taking a moonshot towards a unified transplant healthcare and building a vision for the future of transplant care and health policies.

The congress will have something for everyone, or at least we hope so! Beyond the state-of-the-art science, the disruptive innovation and the trusted clinical care side of the meeting, we have the opportunity to connect, interact, hug old friends and make new ones. What better place to do this than the cradle of European civilisation and democracy?

It is time to book your travel to Athens!



Gabriel C Oniscu

ESOT Congress 2023 Co-Chair
ESOT President Elect