THE FOURTH WORLD CONGRESS OF CARDIOLOGY

The Fourth World Congress of Cardiology was held in Mexico City from October 7 to 13, 1962 under the Presidency of Professor Ignacio Chavez, who in his invitation said it was hoped that the interest of the country itself would contribute to the success of the Congress and attract cardiologists from all over the world. These were prophetic words, for cardiologists converged upon Mexico City in unprecedented numbers. Unfortunately, many of them had given no prior notice of their intention to do so and their sudden arrival somewhat overwhelmed the Committee's well-laid plans. It says much for the ability and philosophy of the Secretariat that all were absorbed, most with a smile, and that within 24 hours the only outward sign that they had not been originally catered for was an announcement that only the first 2000 could attend the Official Banquet!

The scientific sessions were held at the Medical Centre of the Mexican Social Security Institute in the recently completed Congress Building which had been specially designed for such meetings and left little to be desired. It was the envy of many delegates from larger and more “prosperous” countries, and those who had expected the next World Congress to be in London were somewhat surprised to learn of the difficulties there for a meeting of this size when it has to be split into simultaneous sessions. In planning this Congress the aim of the Organizing Committee had been to reduce the number of these to a minimum, and this was achieved by strict selection of individual contributions, confining them to morning sessions and leaving the afternoon free for symposia and panel discussions. Though this undoubtedly subscribed to the success of the Conference and could well become a pattern for future occasions, the old problem of absent speakers caused some embarrassment and concern, for there were many in every audience who would gladly have filled the gaps. With such keen competition for places on the programme some way must be found to discipline those who fail to attend or to give timely warning of their inability to do so.

The mass of clinical and scientific matter presented and discussed in well-integrated sessions emphasized once more what a huge subject cardiology has become, and since each of the four or five thousand present will have gone home with his experience enriched according to his own special tastes and interests, it is difficult to mention individual advances or contributions. However, two great messages that did emerge from this Congress were that surgical replacement of grossly damaged heart valves is now a practical possibility, and that low volume priming with some substance other than blood is about to revolutionize cardiopulmonary bypass techniques.

The symposia also covered a wide range of subjects from advances in experimental electrocardiography and the biochemistry of heart failure to diagnostic errors in myocardial infarction. Unfortunately, many differed from the morning sessions only by having fewer and rather longer papers. They would have been more enjoyable and far more stimulating with more spontaneous discussion and round table debate.

With the application of modern display methods, medical demonstrations appear to get better and better at every meeting. Mexico was no exception, for they were beautifully staged in the air-conditioned basement of the auditorium and interspersed with exhibitions of Mexican painting, sculpture, and local crafts. In the commercial section much of the latest laboratory equipment could be seen in action and the manufacturers questioned about its uses and limitations—a thing one rarely gets a chance to do in this country.

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The highlight in a full and varied programme of social events was a special gala performance of the Mexican National Ballet. This was an extravaganza of music and laughter, colour and dancing, that few who saw it will ever forget. In and around Mexico City there was much to fascinate the sightseer, and after it was all over a few days of Yucatan with its treasures of Mayan culture, Oaxaca the ancient centre of the Zapotecas, or—for those present-day barbarians to whom all ruins have a certain similarity—a little contemporary sun worship on the Pacific Coast at Acapulco.

It is often questioned whether these great Congresses warrant the time and money spent on them: it is said that they are too big and impersonal, and that the manuscripts of papers are required so far in advance that nothing new is ever heard there. These are short-sighted criticisms, for the great value of such gatherings of cardiologists from so many different countries is that old acquaintanceships are renewed, new friends are made, and countless opportunities arise to discuss problems of mutual interest with colleagues from other lands. Those who attend cannot fail to be impressed by the diversity of races and faces at the registration desks on the first day and the great sense of international goodwill that develops as the week progresses.

The Fifth World Congress of Cardiology will be held in India with Professor Duchosal as President and though 1966 may seem a long way ahead, our friends there are already making plans to welcome us to New Delhi.

Those of us who went to Mexico will long remember this land of strange contrasts between the old and the new, the obvious wealth and the abject poverty, the snow-capped mountains and the tropical vegetation. The Congress was a rewarding experience in every way and an outstanding achievement by Professor Chavez and his Secretary General, Dr. Costero. For the organization of the numerous and brilliant social functions, members of the Congress and their ladies are indebted to Mme Chavez and her band of able and willing helpers who worked so hard to make the Fourth World Congress so successful and memorable.

Hamish Watson
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