

Meeting Report: 13th FELASA Congress, 13-16 June, 2016 – Brussels, Belgium

Together with our Board members Benoît Kanzler and Branko Zevnik, I had the chance to take part in the 2016 edition of the triennial conference of the Federation of European Laboratory Science Associations (FELASA), which took place in Brussels, Belgium, between June 13 and 16. With the kind support of our members Sandra Buhl and Kristin Evans we represented ISTT with a booth. The meeting mainly covered topics important for those involved in laboratory animal science. The conference was divided into six streams:

- Governance, including reports on the transposition of 2010 EU Directive aimed at harmonizing animal welfare standards throughout Europe that has a lot of impact on our work but is still in a phase in which the new regulations are being implemented in daily routines. The stream also addressed active information of the public and ways to conduct an ethical review process. Aurora Brønstad, who also presented at TT2016 in Prague, spoke on the important topic of harm-benefit analysis of animal experiments [1, 2].
- Joint programs across Europe, including education and training, competence management, and 3Rs programs, to name just a few.
- Safety issues with a strong focus on health monitoring of aquatic, amphibian, and rodent species. Moreover, this stream included topics such as occupational health and safety and best working practices but also best practices for husbandry and care, quality of feed, water, and enrichment.
- Common diseases of humans and animals. This stream addressed disease and disease models for metabolic disease, cancer, and also infectious disease including zoonoses. It also included presentations on BLS3 facilities and research with non-human primates.
- Animal wellbeing emphasized the importance of using the broad understanding of what is going on inside an animal to assess and improve its wellbeing. The stream contained presentations and discussions about behavioral and neural science, as well as severity assessment, prospectively and also during the time when while animals are being used experimentally by employing clinical signs to recognize pain, suffering distress or lasting harm. I found the latter notably important for our community as we are the ones generating and using genetically altered (GA) animals that may well present with a condition affecting their wellbeing that should be taken into account before starting the experiment and closely followed during their lifetime. GA animals should also be monitored for unforeseen effects that may compromise their wellbeing and measures to alleviate pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm should be taken whenever possible.
- Animal models and animal experiments. For this session I had been asked to convene a session with the title “Genetic modification – technologies and pitfalls”. Together with Ann van Soom, Tom Vanden Berghe and Lluís Montoliu, we informed the audience about the latest technologies in the field, the relevance of the non-coding genome, the threat of passenger mutations, and epigenetic effects. Other sessions in this stream discussed experimental design and reporting, how to process, share, and review acquired as well as existing data, imaging techniques, and various experimental paradigms.

In general there was a strong focus on animal welfare, especially on refinement of procedures, which was present over all streams and sessions. Much of the conference was under the influence of the still ongoing implementation of the regulations of the EU Directive on animal experimentation. Due to the importance of European scientific activities in the world, the pressure on scientific publishers to adopt higher animal welfare and reporting standards, and tight cooperation with countries outside the EU, namely the United States, these regulations will impact on animal experimentation worldwide. The same is true for health standards where FELASA guidelines have already become a gold standard. Although FELASA Conferences draw an audience quite distinct from our TT Meetings,

there is a small but important overlap in interest. I am convinced that the ISTT should keep on striving to foster a vivid exchange with FELASA and the laboratory animal science community.

Boris Jerchow, July 2016

1. Bronstad, A., et al., *Current concepts of Harm-Benefit Analysis of Animal Experiments - Report from the AALAS-FELASA Working Group on Harm-Benefit Analysis - Part 1*. Lab Anim, 2016. **50**(1 Suppl): p. 1-20.
2. Laber, K., et al., *Recommendations for Addressing Harm-Benefit Analysis and Implementation in Ethical Evaluation - Report from the AALAS-FELASA Working Group on Harm-Benefit Analysis - Part 2*. Lab Anim, 2016. **50**(1 Suppl): p. 21-42.