

### WMA Council Meeting, Prague 2012

The WMA council meeting was held in Prague, Czech Republic, from April 26 to 28, 2012. I joined the pre-meeting of the working group (WG) for revising the Declaration of Helsinki (DoH) and other meetings which were held in the 2 days before the main session of the council meeting.

There were several important issues discussed at the council meeting. The biggest concerns were the violence towards healthcare workers in clinical settings and governmental pressure on the independence of medical profession. Both of these issues are clearly invading the efforts of physicians seeking the best interests of their patients under professional autonomy.

I was involved in the WG as chair to revise the 1987 Declaration of Madrid. The concept of professional autonomy was directly derived from the core philosophy of Immanuel Kant connected with practical attitudes and methods thought to be effective at that time. Furthermore, professionally-led regulation needed to be updated because it was not always adaptable to the times. We made considerable efforts revising the old Declaration of Madrid, and the revising process finally reached a conclusion with the decision to divide the Declaration into two main subjects: the basic concept and more practical contents. Thus, the basic philosophy for physicians in the world today was finalized at the WMA General Assembly as the Declaration of Seoul on Professional Autonomy and Clinical Independence, adopted in Seoul 2008. Furthermore, we continued to discuss practical guidelines for all physicians in their clinical settings throughout the world, and these guidelines were adopted the following year as the new Declaration of Madrid on Professionally-led Regulation, adopted in 2009. Accordingly, the WMA provides the Declarations of Seoul and Madrid as essential principles for guiding professional autonomy and professionally-led regulation in association with the WMA Declaration of Geneva.

Looking at recent cases, the basic dignity of our profession seems to be being threatened and even damaged from various directions. We wish to inform all related organizations and govern-



Prague city with long history and culture

ments that policies that threaten the professional autonomy of healthcare workers can lead to difficulty in securing provision of the necessary healthcare for the general public. During the council meeting, the WMA council decided to support the recent efforts of the President and Chair of the WMA in the case of the Turkish Medical Association.

It was my great pleasure to see the vivid mood in Prague compared with the situation there more than 30 years ago, when I visited the city after studying at the National Institute of Neurosurgery in Budapest as young neurosurgeon. As I was an enthusiastic fan of the novelist Franz Kafka as well as the rich tradition of Bohemian music, I decided to seek out traces of Kafka in the city during my stay, which was a harsh era for the city after the political crushing of the Prague Spring with overwhelming military power by the Soviet Republic. The concept symbolized by Kafkaesque absurdity sounded like the basso continuo in the streets and plazas, on Charles' Bridge and Castle Hill, and throughout the city at that time. The city was a heavy dark color, and even when there was a breeze, the atmosphere seemed oppressive in such an environment in October of 1979. After all, the scenery that I saw was his house and places without any representative monument or officially marked symbols of Kafka in the city at that time.

In contrast, the Prague that I visited this time was shining with vitality. Even the Kafka phe-

nomenon had become a prominent feature of the city as demonstrated by the commemorative plates at the house where he was born and the small house where he wrote short pieces within the castle zone, as well as the Kafka museum exhibiting his works and letters, in front of which there is a funnily realistic monument. I felt that the spirit of Kafka's main concept has not become old at all, but that the Kafka phenomenon itself has become mild and is easier for the public to understand. It may be said that Prague has original cultural traditions and lifestyles that lead the world. In addition, the somewhat satirical character and sincere comments of Mr. Broucek, with his drunken eyes, who is the main character of the opera *The Excursion of Mr. Broucek*, composed by Leos Janacek, is also recognized by international audiences. Nevertheless, Mr. Broucek might also provide us with

additional satirical comments about whether we really could comprehend the full context of a work created by Kafka, the genius of Prague, with a keen awareness of the serious crises facing humanity due to current global trends.

On my last days in Prague, I fully enjoyed the splendid sound quality of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra at the Dvorak Hall and tasty wines of the Moravian region. I also appreciated the fine development of the Art Nouveau style at the beginning of the 20th century in the region.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for the excellent hospitality of the Czech Medical Association.

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