Pillars of ESSKA.

ESSKA likes to honour the men that have been the pillars of Sports Medicine in Europe. In this issue we will focus on Prof. Giancarlo Puddu, President of the ESSKA during May 1998 to September 2000.

INTERVIEW PROFESSOR GIANCARLO PUDDU

Interview done the 14th March 2009 by Pietro Randelli

PR: How did you get there?

GP: My dad was a good friend of the Chair of the cardiology department of Geneva, who was a good friend of M. Allgower. I was able to obtain a bursary for the AO Institute, where they did good ground level research.

PR: What was the second step?

GP: The second most important step was in 1972. Prof. Perugia was invited to talk about tendon pathologies at a rheumatology congress in France. He couldn’t go and he sent a very young, me. I was fascinated with Dr. Tria. That year I went to Dr. Tria for 7 or 8 months, and there I learnt a lot. I worked on primary care in the trauma department. There I met Dr. Busquet and Dr. Chambat. In July 1973 the well known articles on Ligament pathologies were published in the JBJS by Jack Hughston and I was asked to translate these by the French. Tria said I should go to America. So during my honeymoon I went to see Jack Hughston, who interviewed me, and made me his fellow the following year. I stayed there for 8 months and I learnt a lot, I completed my knowledge about knee pathologies. Jimmy Andrews had just arrived too, so we did the first arthroscopies, we are talking about 1975. This was the third most important step for me, also because when I was there I became a member of the Herodicus Society, which had only just been founded at the time, I became a member of OSSM, (and as such I now am one of the oldest members), and this opened the door to the Anglo-Saxon world for me.

PR: So this is the time and place that your networking was established, the year you did your fellowship with Jack Hughston.

GP: My network was a mixture of all three “cards”. Still today I have excellent relationships, in particular with the Swiss, but also with the French and Spanish. I am half South American, Peruvian, so I speak Spanish well, and I do conferences in Spanish too.

PR: Who gave you the idea to travel for your studies? Your father?

GP: Yes, my father. My father was one who worked abroad a lot, and in this way more than any other he helped me, he always encouraged me to be away. Every summer I got a bursary and went somewhere, because at the time, the American Embassy….. well no one asked for anything, all you had to do was go to Via Veneto in Rome, fill in a request form, and they would give you a bursary immediately. In this way I was able to go away one month a year.

PR: According to you what do the Europeans have to offer more, or in what way are they different from the Americans, what are the qualities that we have in Europe compared to those that the North Americans have, what are our strong points, and what are our weak points?

GP: The most important difference, we can say, is that in America all is based on the formation of a career, on what is published at a high level, (because to publish at a low level doesn’t serve any purpose). Being published is part of a vicious circle that of getting grants. Those who have grants can do research, publish their research, and everything is based on this. Secondly, a Young Americans who want to create a medical career know their success depends on how much they are prepared to work. External factors do not count much. Instead in Europe, especially in the Latin countries, the situation is, as you well know, very different.
So it is the mentality, the approach that is totally different. Then in America, they have a secretary that deals with day to day problems, here we have only ourselves.

**PR:** What are, in your opinion, the qualities that we have in Europe, from a technical point of view that could be our advantage when compared to North America?

**GP:** You know we can talk about navigation in knee surgery. Actually we can navigate more in Europe than in the United States.

**PR:** I've read from your CD that you have been published in AJSM, then in Arthroscopy when it came out in '90 / '91 and then mostly in the ESSKA Journal. I see that you have concentrated on these three publications, is because of their high standards of these 3 journals....or because they were specific to your work?

**GP:** I would say exactly that, because they meet my needs, because they are publications that I willingly read. I subscribe to them. It is also a question of my social network, because most articles are written by people I know, and so I can discuss the articles with them. At the end of the day you are part of a “family”. I feel less part of the Clinical Orthopedics Journals etc. I like a publication that is well focused on the topics that interest me.

**PR:** Actually we can navigate more in Europe than in the United States, that we talked about before. ESSKA initially was managed by the presidents, without help, with exception the last few. The big changes, (in ESSKA), came between my presidency and the next, and between that one and the United States, that we talked about before. ESSKA initially was managed by the presidents, without help, with exception the last few. The big changes, (in ESSKA), came between my presidency and the next, and between that one and the following, when we began to see ESSKA having a sound financial standing, and as such could begin to pay staff. Before this, we were constantly being harassed to pay taxes, as you know in Germany we were in arrears, and had a lot of problems, until we moved to Switzerland, that happened when I was president.

**PR:** And so it was only within the last 10 years that ESSKA has revolutionized?

**GP:** There was a revolution in all the societies. ISAKOS from a practically failed society became very important. This change happened from when we began to have congresses that made money, and secondly, when we learnt to ask for grants from the big medical supplies companies. This is something that we learnt from the American companies.

**PR:** So you believe that it is important to always have a good relationship with companies, and that this is driven by the need for scientific research, as well as essential to the function of Scientific Societies?

**GP:** Absolutely, it is indispensable. These companies are part of a surgeon’s life, if he uses certain techniques – there is no getting away from that. The scandal of two years ago in the great American companies, had nothing to do with the people who worked with them (the companies), the people who used the products were involved. Yes, those that didn’t have the slightest involvement in developing the products, but were helped in some way by the industries to go around the world. All my American friends live with this conflict of interest, they taught us this too.

**PR:** Then I wanted to ask about your relationship with your family, that is to say you had an intensive career and all of us young doctors that are in full swing with our careers have doubts that we could be losing out on something else the moment we are driven by our careers.

**GP:** I can answer in two ways. Firstly, I was lucky that my wife is half Sweden half Italian, and she speaks “all” the languages of the world, much better than I do. This made everything easier. My wife is very international, and so for the traveling, being abroad, inviting foreigners etc was very enjoyable for her. So, she helped me a lot, socially speaking. It’s obvious now that I have grandchildren, well I realize a lot... when I see my grandchildren.

I see them relatively little because they live in Lugano, but I realize that I have a relationship with my grandchildren that I never had with my children, because when I returned, (home), my children were sleeping. And when I went to work they were sleeping. All day I was away from home, and so I missed out on a lot of the pleasure that would have been the contact with my children.

**PR:** And with your Italian colleagues, with your colleagues in Europe and around the world, who do you hold in esteem as a person – from a technical point of view, a scientific one, who is there?

**GP:** You know we form part of a “club”, the club of the knee. This was formulated in 1987 / 88. From there a nucleus formed that never been ruined. Not to name names, but there is Silvio Zanoli, and Vittorio Monteleone, and Mario Bianchi, all those that were involved, like Paolo Aglietti. And naturally that became a core Italian group that grew with the formation of the Italian arthroscopic society. Of course, each of us did courses and became elected.

Then abroad, my greatest triumph was being part of Herodicus Society from the beginning, and so meeting and becoming friends with all the then new members, Lonnie Paulos, Freddie Fu et al., who today have become the big names in America. Then I had the good fortune to always host the traveling fellows of the AOSSM, and at the time, these were the men I just mentioned. And so they came, accompanied of course, as
young men to stay in my home, and so my home became a port of call for all those that did the knee from around the world, and this meant that I entered into a circle of friends that we can say will never end. Great friends, wherever I go I have friends. Recently I was a month in the United States. I started off in Naples Florida, where there was a small meeting at a very amusing society, called the Quickly Society, which was formed by Tom Quickly, who was, we can say, the first professor of sports medicine at Harvard. To become a member of this society you have to have, attended Harvard University, you have to have been a real athlete at Harvard, and be an orthopedic. There are only 25 members, and I was invited there to talk. Then I went to Baylor University in Houston. After that I went to Pittsburgh, not to Freddie Fu’s but to Patrick De Maio, he is an Italian Chair at another university. He is young, charming and going at full steam.

Then I went to St Louis, where I went to Washington University, then I went to Missouri University in Columbia, then to Minneapolis to E. Harner and Robert LaPrade, then to Buffalo New York. After Buffalo New York there was Cleveland, which was a wonderful experience. One could loose ones head over Cleveland’s clinic. Apart from the fact that they have 49 thousand employees, it is the second biggest industry in Ohio, and the research centre is a huge building, all research is done in the same building. From cellular research to how to hit a nail with a hammer, to NASA research and so on. And it works this way. You have a grant like everyone, to do research. So they ask what research you want to do? “On Fibre Plastics? Laboratory... no problem!” And they say to you, you can start in 20 days and it will cost you €20.000. At that point you can do whatever research you want because you pay. You give the institute your grant to be able to do your research. And another fascinating point, is that if you have an idea for developing a surgical instrument, they will make it for you at a cost of “x” after 15 days. If you pay double, you can have it in 24 hours.

**PR:** And for a hobby, what do you do? I know you also travel for your hobby, antique cars. Where did you go?

**GP:** Yes, I did Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, the whole peninsular. Very Beautiful. No surgery, no arthroscopy. I was the only Italian; the others were almost all English. It’s an English sport, if it can be called a sport.