European Journal of Human Genetics (2017) 25, S50

www.nature.com/ejhg

PERSPECTIVE

Recognition of clinical genetics in Europe

John Burn

European Journal of Human Genetics (2017) **25,** S50; doi:10.1038/ejhg.2017.156

Between 1989 and 1996, I was General Secretary of the UK Clinical Genetics Society and worked with Peter Farndon and others to create the British Society for Human Genetics. During that time I became involved through Giovanni Romeo with the ESHG and supported the early reforms. I served on the Council for several years. In the early 2000s, I was encouraged to become involved again and agree to have my name put forward as President. I considered this a great honour and filled the role as VP and President in the period 2005–2008. An early issue was the decision of the Romanian government to remove Clinical Genetics from its list of specialities, as it was not recognised as a European specialty. I was able to help reverse this decision, including a letter in Romanian with the help of a Romanian PhD student working in our institute at the time.

This experience stimulated me to become more involved in the issues around achieving specialty status. I helped deal with resistance in Belgium, Greece and Spain, and approached Arnold Munnich for help in getting this on the agenda with the Commission. Arnold arranged a splendid breakfast meeting with the deputy Minister of Health at their Ministry in Paris. Although, there was little progress but they noted the proposal and Milan Macek, my successor, was able to use his influence with the Czech ministry to retain this proposal when they took over the EU Presidency from France. We had learned that the bureaucrats were inclined to support proposals from consecutive presidencies.

My other contributions were to help create the sub-committee focused on genetic counsellors, and to play a leading role in engaging the Vienna team to become the conference organisers. Jerome del Picchia and his team together with Rose International have been a great asset to ESHG and helped to create the powerful and influential organisation we are part of today.

I've been a consultant clinical geneticist since 1984 and in 1991 became the first Professor of Clinical Genetics at Newcastle University. I started in dysmorphology; my MD thesis was on heart malformation. I helped lead the MRC vitamin trial on neural tube defect prevention. I lead CaPP, the international cancer prevention consortium; CaPP3 (www.capp3.org) will establish the optimal dose for routine use. I also chair a biotech company, QuantuMDx Ltd developing point of care DNA testing devices and am a non-executive director of NHS England.

I was general secretary of the Clinical Genetics Society prior to our creation of the BSHG, which became the British Society for Genetic Medicine during my recent tenure as its Chairman. I chaired the UK Cancer Genetics Group in the 1990s and was a member of the ESHG board. I helped create the International Society for Gastrointestinal Tumours (InSiGHT) and was its first chair. In 2006, I was elected President of the European Society of Human Genetics and played a role in three important initiatives; adoption of professional organisers, recognition of clinical genetics as a European specialty and establishment of formal recognition of Genetic Counsellors within the society. For over 20 years, I have been a teacher at the European School of Medical Genetics.

I helped create the Millennium landmark International Centre for Life in Newcastle, home to our Institute of Genetic Medicine. Our science centre attracts 250 000 visitors a year and over 40 000 schoolchildren for science practicals. I received a knighthood from the Queen in 2010.

Institute of Genetic Medicine, International Centre for Life, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
E-mail: john.burn@nl.ac.uk