

In Times of Health Crisis and War, Science and Education are More Important Than Ever

There is a tradition of publishing an editorial in September each year, at the time of the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS) Annual General Meeting, with the aim of summarising the most important events for the *European Journal of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery* (EJVES) and the Society.¹ During the past few years, we were severely affected first by the pandemic, which the scientific community handled in an excellent way. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the political response, showing its most ugly nationalist and populist faces. The last year has been dominated by the unprovoked full scale Russian invasion of Ukraine², the innumerable war crimes committed by the invaders³, and its effect on the global economy and food supply. The long term consequences of these crimes against humanity are difficult to predict. A recent report of highly multidrug resistant Gram negative bacterial infections in war victims in Ukraine gives a premonition of the potential future consequences for health care in Europe.⁴ The Russian nuclear threat is strongly felt even in faraway Scandinavia, which was severely affected by nuclear fallout after the Chernobyl accident in 1986.

We can only hope that the Russian people will bring necessary change as soon as possible and bring those who have committed war crimes to justice. In the meantime, the ESVS is committed to support health care in Ukraine as much as we are able. The Ukrainian support fund created by the ESVS accepts donations, small and large, that finance the acquisition of strategic equipment to help vascular surgery function in these hostile conditions (<https://esvs.org>).

It is very impressive that in the middle of this turmoil and suffering, Ukrainian vascular surgeons have launched an Internet based registry where they document vascular injuries and their treatment. These data will supply valuable information on how vascular surgery can save life and limb in modern warfare and shows that our Ukrainian colleagues vigorously defend the great legacy of Professor Nikolai L. Volodos.⁵

The EJVES achieved an all time high impact factor of 7.069 in 2020, with reductions in 2021 (6.427) and 2022 (5.7). This may seem negative, but in fact this tendency towards a lower citation is the norm among most scientific journals, and the EJVES maintains its position as the premier vascular surgery journal, 33% above its main competitor,

the North American *Journal of Vascular Surgery*. Furthermore, we moved upwards from 16th to 14th place of the 284 surgical journals. Among them are, for the first time, the second ESVS journal, *EJVES Vascular Forum*, in 240th place with an impact factor of 0.6. Congratulations to Melina Vega de Ceniga and her team for this game changer! We hope that members will now submit more of their innovative and perhaps less scientifically mature research to *EJVES Vascular Forum*.

The production of new guidelines was negatively affected by the pandemic. Only one guideline was published in 2021, the venous thrombosis guidelines⁶, as well as in 2022, the chronic venous disease of the lower limbs guidelines.⁷ A focused update of the acute limb ischaemia guidelines, in light of the pandemic⁸, was also published in January 2022.

The Guidelines Committee has been extremely active since the pandemic, however, and has already published three new papers this year: the carotid and vertebral artery disease⁹, radiation protection¹⁰, and antithrombotic therapy¹¹ guidelines. The two latter^{10,11} are first ever guidelines, important tools in the hands of vascular specialists in their everyday practice.

The VASCUNET collaboration of international vascular registries has also been very active during the pandemic and has worked hard and professionally. The collaboration continues to deliver high quality registry based research and these manuscripts are valuable to the EJVES because of their scientific quality and high citation counts.¹² Furthermore, the collaboration with the International Consortium of Vascular Registries (ICVR), which incorporates US data, has reported large datasets that provide important insights into vascular care and drive improved patient outcomes.¹³

Thus, the fact that the EJVES maintained its position as the most cited vascular surgical journal is not merely explained by the production of guidelines. Every submitted paper is scrutinised both for scientific quality and clinical benefit by at least two of the editors. The main journal accepts short communications, such as Research Letters, Coup d'Oeils, and innovative Jugaars with less demanding scrutiny. Now, when *EJVES Vascular Forum* has an impact factor that we foresee will increase rather rapidly, it becomes more attractive to accept referrals to this journal. Combining high scientific standards in full length articles in the main journal with being more inclusive in other ways is hopefully a good compromise both for readers and authors.

The EJVES continues on the hybrid path, combining open access publishing in which the institution of the corresponding author pays the publication cost, with

Martin Björck is Editor-in-Chief and Jonathan Boyle is Senior Editor of the *European Journal of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery* (EJVES). Philippe Kolh is President of the European Society for Vascular Surgery (ESVS).

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejvs.2023.07.036>

subscription, where the reader or his or her institution or library pays.¹⁴ The proportion of full length articles published as open access has increased progressively from 2% in 2019 to 15% in 2022, and 22% so far during 2023. This is most likely the future of scientific publishing, which we are embracing. We also need to consider the fact that scientific production at a high level is time consuming and expensive, and that up to now it has created an important income for the ESVS, financing other scientific and educational activities.

Both the ESVS and EJVES are placing a strong emphasis on promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within the field.¹⁵ The society acknowledges EDI as a crucial theme that requires continuous monitoring. By fostering an inclusive environment, the ESVS aims to create opportunities for all and ensure fair representation in vascular health care. Not only gender, but also ethnicity, geographical diversity, and age are considered. In the EJVES, every time that we decide to send a paper out for peer review, these factors are considered, and we are as inclusive as possible. Reviewing is the first career step within the journal, and all the current editorial board members and editors started their editorial careers in this way. During 2022, a new assistant editor post was created in order to rejuvenate the editors' group, and this year another two younger colleagues were selected for these posts through a competitive process from ten strong applications. It is encouraging to know that these editorial posts were highly sort after and desirable, and they are an excellent launch pad for an editorial career.

With a view to strengthening our internal ways of working and cultivating a collaborative approach, the ESVS Executive Committee has initiated closer cooperation with all our Committee Chairs, aiming for project harmonisation and seamless integration of efforts. The aim is to facilitate a more cohesive and impactful approach to the organisation of our activities, ultimately to better serve our members.

Education is among our top priorities. In this regard, the ESVS Academy has been instrumental. A series of online and onsite workshops over the past year have covered diverse topics in vascular health and treatment of disease, offering valuable insights to professionals in the field. Additionally, the ESVS Podcast Group's educational offering by way of regular podcast releases has further enriched the Society's activities. The Society's commitment to knowledge dissemination is also reflected in our successful webinars and masterclasses. In 2022, the ESVS organised webinars focusing on endovascular treatment, vascular access, and best practices in challenging vascular cases. Furthermore, the 2023 masterclass was well received, further enhancing educational development opportunities.

We also introduced the Key Opinion Leaders (KOL) forum as a new membership benefit, facilitating engagement and knowledge sharing among experts in the field. The first successful edition on peripheral arterial disease was launched in June, aiming to enhance professional connections and to foster innovative ideas.

The ESVS has also been proactive in expanding its presence and reach through events like "Meet the ESVS". The inaugural event took place in Belgrade, Serbia, in 2022, followed by a successful meeting in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2023. These gatherings provide a platform for networking, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among vascular health professionals.

Furthermore, the ESVS has expanded its global reach through enhanced collaboration with the World Federation for Vascular Surgery (WFVS). Assuming the presidency of both the ESVS and the WFVS encourages playing a pivotal role in strengthening ties between the two organisations, opening doors for shared knowledge and expertise.

This September sees the 37th ESVS Annual Meeting, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The meeting will host 25 ESVS symposia, filled with debates, panel discussions, Q&A sessions on current hot topics, guidelines, latest clinical trials, and innovation and new technologies, delivered by over 100 leading vascular surgery experts. Some topics not to miss will be guidelines sessions on antithrombotic therapy for vascular diseases, abdominal aorto-iliac artery aneurysms, and peripheral arterial disease; breaking news in clinical trials; vascular trauma sessions on saving legs – "Roasting" the Critical Ischaemia Trialists; innovative pathways of care and technologies for vascular surgery; plus genetic aortopathy and aortic repair.

In addition, delegates can access 12 fast track sessions, 10 e-poster sessions, and over 50 academy workshops. Our academy workshop programme features our regular high demand workshops, plus new topics from the various pathways: Aortic, Vascular medicine, Venous, PAD, Carotid, Ultrasound, and Academic, plus the Certificate of Competences in Vascular Ultrasound (CCVUS) examination.

Recognising the importance of including patients as a focal point, we are committed to run our first Patient Awareness Activity in Belfast, highlighting the significance of patient engagement and empowerment in the management of vascular conditions.

To conclude, we continue to promote science and education within the field of vascular health.

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Martin Björck^{a,b,*}, Jonathan R. Boyle^c, Philippe Kolh^d

^aDepartment of Surgical Sciences, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

^bInstitute of Clinical Medicine, University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

^cCambridge Vascular Unit, Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust & Department of Surgery, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

^dDepartment of Biomedical and Preclinical Sciences, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium; and GIGA Cardiovascular Sciences, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium

*Corresponding author. Department of Surgical Sciences, Vascular Surgery, Uppsala University, SE 75185 Uppsala, Sweden.

E-mail address: martin.bjorck@surgsci.uu.se (Martin Björck)