AN INFORMAL REPORT OF THE 4TH PANNONIAN CONFERENCE OF WHMA:
Professors in the Highlands (Professzorok A Havasokban)

On the map, the road from Marosvasarhely to Gyergyoszentmiklos looks simple enough. In reality, it has long stretches of broken pavement and potholes. On roads like this with frequent travels, says one local, a Mercedes Benz will last three years, a Dacia two months. Progress is painfully slow. Finally, we reach Bucsin Teto (Heights). The Gyergyoi Medence, a remarkably flat mountain basin encircled by snow-capped mountains, opens up before our eyes. At its far end, we can see Gyergyoszentmiklos and next to it the small village of Szárhegy with the prominent Lazar Castle and behind it the medieval Franciscan monastery, our destination. Part of the monastery has been converted into an artists’ colony (alkóto ház). Our accommodation is the only remaining heated room in the building, a 16-bed dormitory; the other with two beds has been already occupied by Prof. Nyirjesy and Mrs. Nyirjesy from Bethesda, Maryland. (The early birds get the private nests). We stoke the tile stove (cserep kalyha) and wrapped ourselves in comforters (paplan) and sheepskins provided with each bed, and try to sleep.

At around 1 AM, the American Professor is awakened by the sound of whistles, at first short and intermittent then prolonged and insistent, followed by banging on the downstairs door and the honking of horns. He puts on his jacket and goes downstairs in his pajamas accompanied by Dr. Csiky from Pecs, his former post-doc and now aide-de-camp. The door is locked, the caretaker is gone, the key is not to be found. Through the cracks in the door, they can see Prof. Jako from Boston and Prof. Weber from Pecs, pioneers of minimally-invasive surgery, banging on the door. Dr. Csiky manages to unbolt the door from the inside and to push it open. A classic case of break-out instead of break-in. The new arrivals are famished. During their long journey, they have followed several “fork-and-knife-500m” signs only to end up at some abandoned building or closed restaurant. Sandwiches are made, a bottle of brandy is maximally-invaded. Dr. Zernovicky from Bratislava lights up his customary pipe and looks serene again. Someone remembers that it is Prof. Rosivall’s birthday (former rector of Semmelweis Medical University). A bottle of red wine (Bulls’ Blood of Eger), a gift intended for somebody in Gyergyo, is opened. Prof. Weber alternates between brandy and red wine with gusto. The American Professor is an incremental drinker (beer-to-wine-to-brandy) starts with brandy and sticks with it. By Gosh, they are eating radishes in the middle of the night. This must be the earliest celebration of any of Prof. Rosivall’s birthdays with the possible exception of his very first one.

In the dormitory, Prof. Jako is grumbling: The last time I slept in a dormitory I was 13 and a boy scout, and that was enough for me. He makes arrangements for transfer to a hotel. The ladies have an uneasy choice either to sleep in the same room with the men or in the ice-cold dormitory for the ladies. They choose the men. Privat Dozent Otto Dworak from Furth, Germany arrives at 4 AM. In the dark, he cannot find the light switch. He turns to the nearest sleeping man: “Do you speak Hungarian?” The no-longer-sleeping man answers curtly: “I do.” “Where can I sleep?” “Find an empty bed.”
Prof. Balogh from Boston and Drs. Illyes and Berczi from Semmelweis Medical School arrive early in the morning by train. A cold wind blows in the men’s showers; somebody left the window open. The men invade the ladies’ showers; the ladies wait patiently outside.

The professors present two half-day minisymposia, one on the diagnosis and treatment of cancer and the other on peripheral vascular diseases. Some 50-60, mainly young physicians and medical students from Marosvasarhely and from small towns of Transylvania attend the 4th Pannonian Conference of WHMA. The older generation of physicians, perplexed as to why Hungarian physicians would come from the West to give them lectures in English now that Hungarian can be spoken freely, largely stay away. Without working knowledge of English you cannot practice up-to-date medicine any more, says one young physician. Like Latin in the Middle Ages, adds Prof. Balogh. (Geza Simon, MD)

THE 6th SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE OF THE HUNGARIAN STUDENT ASSOCIATION OF MAROSVASARHELY – AN UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

During the last international congress of the WHMA, President Arpad Goncz had a dialogue with participants from neighboring countries. It was there that we learned about the annual scientific conference of the students of Marosvasarhely, and about their interest in having guest speakers from Hungary and the West. Impressed by their attitudes, dedication and dignity, the two of us readily volunteered and persuaded Prof. Gyorgy Klein of the Karolinska Institute to join us. We have not been disappointed. The meeting in April of 1999 was quite extraordinary in its scope and professionalism. We were also overwhelmed by their hospitality. For example, when we arrived with our wives very late after 2 AM, two of the organizers, Eniko Pap and Laszlo Venczel, were waiting for us at the lovely Ana-Maria Panzio to make sure that all was well.

The program began with a review of the history of the town by Mihaly Spielman, the director of the local library founded by Samuel Teleki. After an organ concert in the Castle church, we were received by the rector and the deans of the Schools of Medicine, Pharmacy and Dentistry. There was a considerable effort by the Romanian officials to demonstrate that a healthy relationship now exists between the two nationalities. In the afternoon a dialogue was held between Gyorgy Klein and Szent-Gyorgyi based on Klein’s three books: “Live Now”, “Pieta” and “The Atheist and the Holy City”. The audience participated with a wide range of questions. The discussion and all subsequent lectures were conducted in Hungarian. In the evening there was a reception with fabulous food followed by dancing.

The sessions were held in the Culture Palace, a magnificent turn-of-the-century secessionist building. During the next two days, a total of 171 short papers were presented in parallel sessions on preclinical, clinical, pharmacological and dental studies. Each session was opened by an invited lecture by visitors from Hungary including Prof. Antal Renner, Janos Hamar Istvan Eros and Ferenc Dori. The sessions were chaired by students and also attended by faculty members who selected the award winning papers. Of the papers and posters, 137 originated from Marosvasarhely, 9 from the rest of Erdely, 2 from Ujvidek (only female students were allowed to leave), 1 from Kassa, 3 from Pozsony and 32 from Hungary, including Budapest, Szeged, Pecs and Debrecen. Evidently the seeds for joint student conferences of the whole Carpathian basin had been sown. Many of the papers represented useful statistical evaluations of etiology and treatment. Experimental studies in the basic sciences were limited by lack of up-to-date equipment except in the case of contributions from Hungary. The enthusiasm, dedication and the hard work of the students were evident.

The opening plenary talk was on “Albert Szent-Gyorgyi: Scientist and humanist”. The links between several generations of the Szent-Gyorgyi family and Erdely were emphasized (Albert’s great-grandfather was the secretary of Samuel Teleki). Szent-Gyorgyi’s
contributions to science, his stand against fascism, his concern about the future of mankind were described. The lecture ended with playing the tape-recorded speech he had given on the occasion of receiving his honorary degree from the Medical School of Szeged, now named after him. Gyorgy Klein lectured on “Cancer and the new biology”. He reviewed the impact of molecular biology on our understanding of the mechanisms of carcinogenesis, including his and his wife’s (Eva Klein) fundamental work on how chromosomal translocation of the immunoglobulin gene can lead to cancer. Gyorgy Kunos lectured on “New players in the regulation of peripheral vascular tone”. He described his studies on the role of the recently discovered endogenous cannabinoids and their receptors in the control of vascular tone and blood pressure. Andras Szent-Gyorgyi’s talk on “Muscle contraction at the molecular level” reviewed the role of myosin in muscle contraction, and described recent studies on the changes in the atomic structure of myosin responsible for force production and movement.

Following an evening concert in the main auditorium, we had a delightful dinner in the home of Prof. Zoltan Brassai, who is the most important faculty supporter of the students’ scientific endeavors. The conference concluded with the award ceremony and speeches by Prof. Brassai, by Maria Fulop, the president of the organizing committee (with members Istvan Gergely, Zsolt Olvedi, Eniko Pap, Csongor Suba, Levente Vass, Laszlo Venczel), and by Istvan Gergely, the newly elected president of the Student Association. Then the outgoing president, Levente Vass spoke, and we were presented with beautiful tour-books of Szekelyfold to help us explore Erdely.

To say that we were greatly impressed by the qualities of these young people is an understatement. They have raised major contributions from 21 different sponsors and had worked tirelessly to organize this meeting. Their enthusiasm and commitment to do their best bodes well for the future. It was an example of how discrimination and difficulties sometimes can bring out the best in a young generation when a spirit of community is present. Their need for up-to-date textbooks and monographs is great, and such donations could be sent to: Asociata Studentilor Maghian din Targu Mures, OP 5 CP 52 N. Grigorescu 17/19, 4300 Targu Mures, Romania. (Andrew G. Szent-Gyorgyi, MD and George Kunos, MD, PhD).

CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT THE MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Dear Members, after four years of service, I will not renew my two-year term as chairman of the Membership Committee at the end of this year, and consequently, I will resign as member of the Executive Committee and as unofficial treasurer. One of the advantages of term-limitation is that it tests the vitality of an organization. By providing an opportunity for young members to join the governing body of the organization, it widens the base of active members.

Upon leaving the Executive Committee, I have mixed feelings about our organization. On the one hand, it has been very successful in organizing large and small meetings in Hungary and in surrounding countries. These meetings have been generally well-received by young physicians in the region. Finding speakers for our international conferences has not been a problem, but the members have been less willing to participate in the less prestigious and more demanding small meetings outside of Hungary (see report of the 4th Pannonian Conference of WHMA in this issue of the newsletter). My greatest disappointments have been lukewarm financial support and the lack of active participation of our members. During my four years in office, we had more or less 50-60 members, out of about 300 in the "West", who have paid their dues. Sponsors and patrons have been far and few between. As a result the funds necessary for meaningful support of young colleagues in Central Europe (scholarships, grants, exchange programs, awards, etc.) were not there. In light of the prosperity that we enjoy in the "West", this tepid generosity puzzles me. Perhaps, the next
generation of leaders of our organization will be more successful in inspiring you to give and to serve.

As of January 1st, 2000, Thomas Kekes-Szabo MD, MSc (School of Nursing, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1701 University Blvd., Rm. 224, Birmingham, AL 35294-1210, USA, tel.: (205) 975-8956, FAX: (205) 975-2501, e-mail: KEKESST@uab.edu.) will take over the duties of the Membership Committee, and from thereon all membership-related matters should be addressed to him.

P.S.: By the way, in case you haven't paid your 1999 dues, please do so now. (Geza Simon, MD)

MEETING INVITATION

The 31st Annual Meeting of the Hungarian Medical association of America (HMAA) will be held October 24-28, 1999 in Sarasota, FL, at the Harley Sandcastle Beach Hotel. The title of the professional symposium is “More Knowledge, Better Care”. The symposium is CME credited and AMA approved, and is sponsored by the Departments of Medicine and of CME, SUNY at Buffalo, NY. The following four sessions are organized: 1) Latest studies on cerebro-vascular events (basic science and clinical studies), 2) Minimal invasive procedures (update in surgery), 3) Bekessy Memorial Session (otolaryngology and audiology), 4) Multidisciplinary session.

The HMAA welcomes attendance by members as well as non-members. If you are interested in attending, please contact: Ivan M. Krisztinicz, MD, President of HMAA, 91 Mt. Vernon Rd., Snyder, NY 14226, tel/FAX: (716) 839-2524, e-mail: hmaa@hmaa.org.

In addition, we would also like to announce that from next year (i.e., 2000) WHMA will continue its US-Canadian conference series. Namely, Janos Szebeni, MD, PhD (Bethesda, MD & Budapest, Hungary) responded to our appeal published in a previous issue of the WHMA Newsletter, and he is willing to organize the 5th US-Canadian conference of WHMA. It is up to him and the leadership of HMAA whether these conferences will be held together or back-to-back in Florida, or in association with other large national meetings (e.g., FASEB, Neuroscience, Cancer conferences), or independently in various cities of the USA and Canada. As you may recall, the US-Canadian conferences like other regional Pannonian Conferences of WHMA are mainly devoted to postgraduate education and complement our international congresses, which provide broad and specific overviews in basic sciences and clinical practice.

INVITATION TO A MILLENIAL CELEBRATION

The Semmelweis Society (a society of Hungarian physicians living in Germany) is organizing a New Year’s Eve party at the end of this year, and would welcome attendance by members of the WHMA. The venue is the Festetics castle in Keszthely, Hungary, which has been rented by the society for this function. The program will include a guided tour of the castle, champagne reception in the hall of mirrors complete with live baroque music, gala dinner on the 31st, cabaret, music and dance all night, and a New Year’s Day reception in the Thermal Hotel at Heviz. Room and board are available in the castle itself and in area hotels or bed & breakfast places, ranging in price from $40 to $130 per room per day, including breakfast.

Registration fee: $125, deadline for registration: October 5, 1999. Address for registration and inquiries: Dr. Peter Szutrely, Grunewalder Strasse 55, D-42657 Solingen, Germany. Tel. 49-212-815041, FAX 49-212-815942, e-mail: Szutrely@aol.com.
YET ANOTHER MEETING: THE MILLENNIAL WORLD CONGRESS OF HUNGARIAN PHYSICIANS

This congress, co-organized by a number of Hungarian professional societies, including WHMA will take place in Budapest, Szeged, Pecs and Debrecen from August 16-19, 2000. More about the congress, its themes, and addresses for inquiries and registration can be found on the WHMA’s web-page at its new address: www.whma.net.

WHMA HAS A NEW WEB-SITE

As you may have noticed in the above announcement, WHMA has a new web-page: www.whma.net. This contains some general information about WHMA, displays the current issues of the WHMA newsletter and will provide up-to-date information about upcoming events organized or sponsored by WHMA. Our web-site will soon contain the WHMA membership directory which can be updated on-line. Thus, be sure to visit the new WHMA web-site!