

## Highlight: 60 Years of Belgian Society of Fundamental & Clinical Physiology and Pharmacology

Before the Second World War Belgian physiologists and pharmacologists met under the umbrella of the Société de Biologie, the respected scholarly society founded in 1848 by Claude Bernard and his Colleagues. Scientific communications were published in the Comptes Rendus. On 29 March 1947, less than two years after the end of the war, the Belgian Society of Physiology was founded by a group of twelve physiologists and pharmacologists from the four Belgian Universities existing at the time: the Governmental Universities of Liège (ULg) and Gent (RUG) and the Private Universities of Brussels (ULB) and Louvain (KUL/UCL). The twelve founders were: J.J. Bouckaert, C. Heymans, J. Van De Velde (RUG), Z.M. Bacq, M. Florquin, H. Frédéricq (ULg), F. Bremer, J. La Barre, P. Rylant (ULB), J.P. Bouckaert, J. Hoet, and A. Simonart (KUL/UCL).

The aim of the Society was clearly defined in the first article of the statutes: "The organization of scientific meetings during which the Belgian Physiologists (and eventually their guests) can present and bring up for discussion the results of their recent researches in the fields of physiology and pharmacology". The first meeting of the Society took place on Saturday, 22 November 1947 in the Laboratory of Physiology in Leuven at the invitation of J.P. Bouckaert. There were 4 demonstrations and 27 oral presentations on the programme. The hand-written account of the secretary, the pharmacologist A. Simonart, reported that the meeting lasted until late in the evening because the discussions had been lively and not limited in time. Accordingly, for the next meeting, held on 22 May 1948 at the invitation of C. Heymans in the Laboratory of Pharmacology in Gent, a time of fifteen minutes, including discussion, was allocated to each speaker as is still the case now. Between 1946 and 1960 two meetings were held per year but the frequency was increased to three or four per year between 1961 and 1999, to be reduced again to two per year beginning in 2000.

Society dues are used to affiliate with the European Federations of Physiology (FEPS), of Pharmacology (EPHAR) and of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics (EACPT). Memberships in the International Unions of Physiological Sciences (IUPS) and Basic and Clinical Pharmacology (IUPHAR) are supported by the Royal Academies thanks to the National Committee for Physiology and Pharmacology of the Belgian Academies of Science, founded in 2002.

The Society held 158 meetings during the six decades of its existence (November 1947 to November 2007). The statutes of the Society stated that the meetings were to be held in turn in one of the four existing universities, and that was indeed the case until 1970. The foundation of new University Centi and the split of the two Private Universities according to French and Flemish



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## 60 YEARS OF BELGIAN PHYSIOLOGY & PHARMACOLOGY

languages in the 1960s and 1970s increased tremendously (from four to twelve!) the number of potential meeting locations. In addition, one took place in the Research Department of Janssen Pharmaceutica (Beerse near Antwerp). From the onset the Belgian Society sought scientific contacts with sister European societies. Accordingly, some twenty "Joint Meetings" were organized between 1951 and 1997 with foreign Pharmacological and Physiological Societies (British, Dutch, French, Italian and German). Half of the joint meetings were held abroad and half in Belgium. The creation and conferences of EPHAR, EACPT and FEPS eventually replaced the individually organized joint meetings.

The principal aim of the meetings was, and still is, the presentation and discussion of the results of both experimental and clinical research in the field of Physiology and Pharmacology. Until the meeting in September 1973 this was only done through oral communications and demonstrations. The number of demonstrations decreased with time and disappeared entirely in the nineties for practical and technical reasons. By contrast, the number of communications increased with the expansion of the universities and their research groups. In order to keep the duration of the meetings within reasonable limits, poster presentations were adopted in 13 September 1973, starting with the Joint Meeting with the Dutch Societies of Physiology and Pharmacology in Gent. The poster presentations were from the outset a great success and allowed the traditional limit of 15 minute oral presentations. It is worth mentioning that since 1969 each meeting of the Society held in Belgium started with an "Invited Lecture" of 45 to 60 minutes on a contemporary subject in either physiology or pharmacology, delivered in most cases by an international speaker of prominence. These lectures have been supported since 1973 by financial aid from Belgian scientific organisations. Until 1994, reports of the Society appeared either in Archives internationales de Pharmacodynamie et de Therapie or in Archives internationales de Physiologie et de Biochimie. From 1994 until 2005 physiological abstracts appeared in Pflüger Archives and, since 2005, in Acta Physiologica, the official FEPS Journal, whereas pharmacological abstracts have been published since 1994 by Fundamental and Clinical Pharmacology, the official EPHAR Journal.

Approximately 500 scientists have been accepted as members of the Society since the founding in 1947. The Society maintains a high standard of scientific activity due to the faithful attendance of senior members, young PhDs, and graduate students. •

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Honorary Permanent Officers  
Belgian Society of Fundamental and Clinical Physiology and Pharmacology  
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