Scotland is a historic centre for public health and epidemiology; a place that exemplifies global problems of health inequality, high incidence of chronic diseases and the risk factors of smoking, physical inactivity, alcohol excess and obesity. Yet, Scotland is innovative and vigorous in tackling its problems. The World Congress of Epidemiology, established in 1957, returns to Edinburgh, the capital city, after 30 years. Academic departments at the Universities of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh and Glasgow and NHS Health Scotland are ready to welcome an expected 1200 colleagues to a feast of high-quality scientific and epidemiological offerings. The congress will be preceded by the IEA advanced course in epidemiology. The website (www.epidemiology2011.com) shows the internationally renowned epidemiologists who will be participating in the congress through plenary presentations, workshops and symposia. The congress allows a rare opportunity for global dialogue for epidemiologists, public health specialists and clinicians. In consonance with the IEA’s intensified global focus, we have an aspiration that every country in the world is represented and we are offering bursaries to help in this goal.

The scientific programme has adopted five strategic themes and the main plenary lectures, symposia and free presentations are structured around these themes. The numerous parallel sessions will allow participants to move freely between themes, but abstracts will also be accepted on other topics. There will be regional IEA workshops, a workshop for young epidemiologists and an IEA workshop on the current state of epidemiology. There will be a plenary session on Global Health with presentations on nutrition and obesity (Reddy), trends in East and Central Europe (Zatonski) and the global burden of disease (Lopez) with linked symposia on the global burden of disease and the ‘Supercourse’, a repository of lectures on global health and prevention. The Cutting Edge Methodology plenary lectures include presentations by Sander Greenland, Albert Hofman and Richard Peto with symposia on life course epidemiology, bio-banking, complex systems and spatial analysis. There will be a plenary on Chronic Diseases covering ageing (Khaw), tobacco (Vichit-Vadakan) and disease control (Li) with symposia on ageing, cohort studies and tobacco. Neglected Conditions has plenary sessions on HIV (Detels), Tropical Diseases (Alonso) and inequalities (Marmot) with symposia on ethnicity and healthy ageing. The final theme is Epidemiology and Policy with plenary lectures by Beaglehole, Macintyre and Victora and symposia by INCLEN and NICE. The scientific programme also includes the John Snow (Davey Smith), Robert Cruikshank (Detels) and the Richard Doll (presenter to be announced) lectures.

Around the time of the congress two great festivals will be taking place. The 64th Edinburgh Fringe Festival is from 5–29 August and is the largest and, by repute, the most exciting arts festival in the world offering 32 000 performances in 250 venues, not to mention the non-stop free street entertainment. In addition, the Edinburgh International Festival with its concerts, operas and dramas takes place from 12 August–4 September.

We have the structure and the key presentations in place for a truly outstanding epidemiology congress, yet one thing is lacking, and that is your participation. This congress needs your participation to bring it to life through submission of abstracts and active engagement in discussions and debates. The early registration deadline is 29 April and because Edinburgh is an extremely popular tourist destination in August, delegates are encouraged to arrange their accommodation early. We have sourced different types of accommodation suitable for various budgets. We also
have competitive bursaries available for younger individuals from low- and middle-income countries and also for younger epidemiologists working in Scotland. We hope that this will make it possible for some to attend who may otherwise have found it difficult. You are therefore cordially invited to join the XIXth IEA World Congress of Epidemiology, and a warm Scottish welcome awaits you.