Petar M. Seferović new HFA President

Mark Nicholls speaks to Professor Petar M. Seferović the incoming President of the ESC Heart Failure Association (HFA) about his goals and vision for the future of the organization

The Heart Failure Association (HFA) has been a pillar of the ESC for many years, a world leader in raising awareness, prevention, and therapeutic options of the condition. With a mission to improve quality of life and longevity through better prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of heart failure (HF)—including the establishment of networks for its management, education, and research—the HFA has a record of staging effective congresses, courses, and forums.

Professor Petar M. Seferović has a long-standing role in the field and with the Association but now, as he succeeds to the HFA Presidency, he has outlined a vision to further evolve the organization’s work, particularly through strengthening the network of Heart Failure National Societies (HFNS). That will also see a new road map for the development of the society, an ESC HFA Atlas in Europe (HFA Atlas) and HF Centres of Excellence.

Speaking ahead of the HFA Congress in Vienna 26–29 May, when he takes up office, he said: ‘I see my Presidency as an opportunity for further progress of the activities and image of HFA. Since I have been instrumental in strengthening the network of Heart Failure National Societies (HFNS), institutions and experts in Europe, I plan to work extensively in the HFNS area to boost the capacity of HFA’.

Professor Seferović MD, PhD, FESC, FACC, has been involved with the ESC for many years, starting as treasurer of the Yugoslav Society of Cardiology (1984). Later, with growing involvement in HFA projects, he noted the approaches of different Presidents over the years as a personal friend and colleague of many of them, as each added value to the activity of the predecessor.

Succeeding Professor Frank Ruschitzka in the office, he added: ‘HFA is a global HF front-runner, one of the major players in the ESC family, and one of the drivers of its progress. Based on the wider ESC picture, HFA should commit itself to work on the strategic pillars, namely congress, education, research, advocacy and membership’.

Currently Chair of Internal Medicine at Belgrade University School of Medicine and Professor in the Heart Failure Department at the University Medical Center Belgrade, Seferović was born in the Serbian capital and trained at Belgrade University School of Medicine and Kings College Hospital in London. In the early 1990s, he spent 2 years as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Methodist Hospital and Baylor College of Medicine, Houston, USA, and on his return to Serbia introduced several methods of interventional cardiology for myocardial and pericardial disease in Serbia, including percutaneous transluminal angioplasty, endomyocardial biopsy, percutaneous pericardioscopy, and pericardial biopsy.

From the mid-90s onwards, he has dedicated his clinical activity to HF, especially acute HF, immunoadsorption, and stem cell treatment. His major research interests include acute HF, the role of type 2 diabetes in cardiovascular disease, and particularly in HF, myocardial, and pericardial disease, and HF drugs. His work to date with the HFA has seen him committed to working with national societies, helping start the HFNS Summits (in 2011), the organization of the Heart Failure Awareness Day (in 2009), and International Joint Sessions (in 2011). However, he added: ‘During those years of collaboration, many projects and the expanded alliance of the HFA and HFNS were put in place, but now we believe it is time to achieve new milestones’.

A key initiative has been the ESC HFA Atlas in Europe (HFA Atlas), as a subchapter of the ESC Atlas, dedicated to a description of HF management in up to 37 ESC countries. The complex activity was started by Seferović in December 2016 and after a year of exchanging experiences and meetings, 51 HF specific variables were agreed upon with the final document due to be completed early in 2019 and presented during 2019 HFA Annual Congress in Athens. He said: ‘HF Centres of Excellence will be based on information provided by the HFA Atlas, and designed to identify top HF institutions in a particular country. The information gathered by the HFA Atlas will allow us to reshape and modify the structure of the HF Centres of Excellence to fit most of the ESC countries’.

Seferović, who is the Corresponding member of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts and President of the Heart Failure Society of Serbia, also hopes to increase the number of HFA members, currently at 10 000-plus. ‘That is crucial for the well-being and strength of the HFA’, he added. ‘Based on information provided by the HFA Atlas and powered by the organization of the HF Centres of Excellence, it is realistic to expect the increase in HFA membership. It is important to realize that among 95 000 members of the ESC a significant number are still in search of their subspecialty. By boosting their interests for HF, we may expect to attract a growing number of new HF specialists’.

Important to the future development of the HFA is a roadmap for the organization that Seferović plans to develop. He said: ‘Congress
activities will continue with the Annual HFA Congresses, the leading world HF meeting, usually with more than 5 000 participants, as well as the HF Winter Research meeting, the most prominent basic cardiology gathering in Europe.

Research activities will be based on the efforts of 15 HFA Committees and Study groups, with specific Workshops, leading to the production of Position papers and Consensus statements, and key documents in various HF fields. ‘Education is one of the most developed elements of HFA activity, including HF certification, HF specialist curriculum, and the HF nurse curriculum. It is particularly focused on young HF specialists of tomorrow through the world-wide known Zurich Postgraduate Course in Heart failure (third edition this year) and HFA Clinical Trialists Summer School’.

The annual HFA Congress and other meetings (HFA Winter Meeting, International Joint Sessions) are attracting increasing numbers of participants from around the World and the heartfailurematters.org website (with 2.2 million visitors) is helping address patient needs, along with two HFA Journals—the Open Access ESC Heart Failure and the European Journal of Heart Failure with a rising impact factor of 6.96 and now one of the most popular HF journals. He believes the organization is making a difference in terms of sharing experience, advance knowledge and benefitting patients.

‘HFA has become the central platform for researchers, cardiologists interested in HF, the pharmaceutical industry and patients’, he said. ‘Through its activities, HFA covers basic science research, prevention, clinical aspects and novel treatment modalities. Research is the strong point of HFA, starting from registries, surveys and epidemiology, to the many scientific workshops, giving state-of-the-art recommendations in diagnosis and treatment’. The HFA has seen significant success, growth, and increased influence in recent years with leading scientific programmes at the annual conference, while a recent restructuring at the HFA Committees and Study Groups covering most of the HF scientific areas and will allow for a comprehensive clinical overview.

For the Annual HFA Congress 2018 in Vienna in May, the main theme is ‘Classical repertoire, modern instruments.’

‘Several highlights will be presented, in particular those focused on devices and procedures in structural and valve disease’, added Seferović. ‘The dilemma of diagnostic algorithm for HF with preserved ejection fraction will also be discussed, combined with several sessions on HF with mid-range ejection fraction. The basic science track will again be very translational, with a specific session underlining the background of success of major cardiovascular trials’.

Specific sessions will reflect on the 50th anniversary of the heart transplant, honour HFA awardees, and hear from ESC president-elect Barbara Casadei, and world-renowned cardiologist Dr Eugene Braunwald speaking on the future role of genetics.

Conflict of interest: MN declares no conflict of interest.

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Heart failure in Diabetic patients

New directions in diagnosis and treatment for heart failure in patients with type 2 diabetes are discussed by Dr Swoboda and Professor Plein from Leeds, UK

Patients with type 2 diabetes mellitus have a two- to three-fold increased risk of developing heart failure independently of conventional risk factor such as age, sex, coronary artery disease and hypertension. When patients with diabetes develop heart failure, they have substantially worse outcomes than those without diabetes, making this combination of diseases a pressing clinical problem.

The pathophysiology of diabetic heart failure is complex and includes adverse effects of hyperglycaemia, hyperinsulinaemia, insulin resistance, and altered lipid metabolism on the myocardium, as well as endothelial dysfunction and autonomic neuropathy. Despite these numerous contributors to diabetic heart failure, its current treatment follows similar principles to that of non-diabetic populations, partly because specific therapies for diabetic heart failure have been elusive.

An obvious disease-specific target for the condition would be to improve glycaemic control. Indeed, large observational studies have shown that poor control of blood glucose increases the risk of heart failure, in particular in female patients. However, initial trials failed to show a reduction in the risk of heart failure hospitalization in patients with diabetes despite improved glucose control. To compound matters some agents such as the peroxisome proliferator-activated receptor gamma (PPARγ) agonists, even increased heart failure events.