**Report on 7th ESPE Caucasus and Central Asia School, held in Yerevan, Armenia from Wednesday 19th to Saturday 22nd April 2023**

This year’s ESPE Caucasus and Central Asia (C&CA) School felt particularly special. Following the highly successful meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2019, organisation of further C&CA school had been plagued with a series of difficulties relating to the Covid-19 pandemic and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia.

Because of Covid restrictions, the 2020 meeting was cancelled. In October 2021, a face-to-face meeting was still not possible and so two introductory webinars on Paediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes were held online for all the doctors who had applied to C&CA school that year. In 2022, the war in Ukraine had caused ESPE Council to request rescheduling C&CA school from Tbilisi in Georgia in September to Yerevan in Armenia because of Georgia sharing a border with Russia. A 2-hour Zoom meeting with the faculty was held in September in preparation for the Yerevan meeting, with focus on a new three-part series of Growth and Puberty Masterclasses, initially filmed in English with now with Russian text and subtitles. However, the late September meeting in Yerevan was postponed when air travel to Armenia from Central Asia became impossible owing to Russian citizens fleeing conscription, so that the airports were in chaos.

It was, therefore, a considerable relief when the rescheduled 7th C&CA school went ahead successfully in April this year. The 3-day meeting took place in Ramada Hotel in Yerevan, the ancient capital of Armenia which contains one third of Armenia’s 3 million population. As in Astana in 2019, the 4th day of the meeting was made into an open day for all interested healthcare professionals and was held at Muratsan University Hospital in Yerevan. The meeting was coordinated by Dr Alina German and hosted by Professor Elena Aghajanova from Yerevan State Medical University and Muratsan University Hospital who, with her team, showed great hospitality to all the participants visiting Armenia.

The faculty in Armenia comprised 21 students and 6 teachers *(*[*picture 1*](https://www.eurospe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Picture-1-CCA-faculty-Armenia-2023-scaled.jpg)*).* The students were from Armenia (11), Georgia (5) and Kazakhstan (5). This year, there were no participants from Central Asian countries other than Kazakhstan, relating mainly to travel costs. Also, the ongoing disputes between Armenia and neighbouring Azerbaijan prevents doctors from the one country being able to enter the other.

The teachers were Alina German (Israel, coordinator), Rasa Verkauskiene (Lithuania), Jan Lebl (Czech Republic), Malcolm Donaldson (UK), Malika Alimussina (Kazakhstan but based in the UK at present), Franco Chiarelli (Italy, joining remotely) and Elena Lundberg, (Sweden).

In keeping with previous C&CA schools, presentations from teachers and students were given using dual projection with English and Russian text, the Armenian and Kazak students generally finding Russian easier, the Georgian students usually preferring English. Dual projection has its challenges but happily, once the ‘teething difficulties’ had been resolved, the programme went very well indeed.

This hybrid model of the school was a first experience for the faculty. This included watching excerpts from the previously recorded ESPE e-learning Masterclasses in Growth and Puberty (with Russian text and subtitles), and also a Zoom lecture by Prof Francesco Chiarelli.

Topics covered this year included Normal Growth and Puberty, Smallness-for-Gestational age, Growth Abnormalities including Growth Hormone Deficiency and Treatment, Congenital Hypothyroidism, Management of Thyrotoxicosis, Calcium disorders and Obesity. The lectures on Diabetes were particularly strong, with Rasa covering Monogenic Diabetes, Elena (able to lecture for the first time since joining us in 2020!) giving two lectures on the practical, “Real-life” management of Diabetes, including the use of closed loop systems, and Franco giving a Zoom lecture from Italy on the management of Diabetic Ketoacidosis.

A benefit of having a relatively small student faculty is that with four sessions of Teachers’ Cases, it was logistically feasible for all students to be taught by all the teachers during the 3-day meeting *(*[*picture 2*](https://www.eurospe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Picture-2-Teachers-cases-with-Elena-and-Jan-scaled.jpg)*)*. There were no student research projects this year, but each student presented a clinical case, and the standard was generally very high. The presentations judged the best were by Associate Professor Lusine Navasardyan (Armenia) on escalating and probably monogenic obesity; Dr Gayane Bayburdyan (Armenia) on two babies with neonatal diabetes and very different outcomes. A further presentation by Dr Sona Samvelyan (Armenia) on central precocious puberty, was recommended to be presented as an e-learning portal case.

The afternoon excursion on day 3 took the form of a coach ride into the hills beyond Yerevan to visit Monastery Geghard in Kotyak province *(*[*picture 3*](https://www.eurospe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Picture-3-CCA-faculty-at-Monastery-of-Gheghard-Armenia-scaled.jpg)*)*. During the journey our excellent guide Narine Vardanyan spoke to us about Armenian history and culture. The genocide of 1915 still casts a long shadow, and Armenians from all over the world were about to participate in a day of remembrance on the following day. The monastery complex, founded in the 4th century by “Gregory the Illuminator”, is carved out of the rock in the cliffs, and we found the simplicity of the ancient chambers profoundly moving. This visit was followed by a coach ride to the pagan temple of Garni, Grecian in style and overlooking the Azat River were we listened to the traditional ‘Duduk’ instrument being played, watched Lavash – Armenian flatbread – being made in a nearby bakery, and had our gala dinner in a nearby restaurant.

The fourth day comprised a one-day open meeting at the Armenian Muratsan University hospital was attended by the C&CA faculty plus another 20 young doctors from Yerevan. The presentation on Growth and Puberty by Malcolm and Malika demonstrated how to enrol for the ESPE Masterclasses, showing that doctors from anywhere in the world can register with ESPE e-learning for free. Further lectures were on the practical aspects of diabetes management, with focus on new technologies (Elena Lundberg), Bone Fragility (Malika), Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (Rasa), Learning from cases of hypoglycaemia (Jan), another Zoom lecture from Franco, this time on Obesity [*(picture 4*](https://www.eurospe.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Picture-4-Francos-lecture-on-Obesity-by-on-Zoom-scaled.jpg)*)*, Pubertal disorders (Jan) and our hostess Elena Aghajanova on the topic of Gynaecomastia.

The session ended with the two ‘winning’ case presentations by Gayane and Lusine and the giving out of certificates.

This was one of the best C&CA schools yet, and we are very grateful to ESPE council for once again generously funding this initiative. The next school is scheduled to take place in Samarkand, Uzbekistan during the second week of April - 8-14th - 2024 with Professor Gulnora Rakhimova hosting the meeting.

Malcolm Donaldson and Alina German on behalf of the C&CA school faculty, July 2023

Picture 1. ESPE C&CA School Faculty in Yerevan, Armenia, April 2023

Picture 2. Teachers’ cases with Elena Lundberg (left) and Jan Lebl (right) Ramada hotel, Yerevan, Armenia

Picture 3. C&CA faculty at Monastery of Geghard, Armenia, April 2023

Picture 4. Franco Chiarelli’s Obesity Lecture on Zoom during open day at Yerevan University, April 2023