

Highlights from the 21st European Congress on Obesity 2014

19 December 2014

In May 2014, the 21st European Congress on Obesity (ECO), hosted by the European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO), took place in Sofia, Bulgaria. Obesity is one of the fastest developing public health problems of our time and the congress provided an essential platform for discussion on the latest scientific developments in the field. The objectives of the ECO were: to provide an annual forum for the exchange of information about state of the art research in the field of obesity, to identify innovative preventive and treatment strategies to reduce the prevalence of obesity and its associated burden of diseases, and to bring together the experts in the field of obesity research and management.

ECO gathers a wide range of audience from clinicians, scientists, health professionals, to opinion leaders and advocacy groups. EUFIC interviewed 10 renowned speakers at the conference, who summarised their work on the obesity problem.

João José Cerqueira

João José Cerqueira is Associate Professor of neurology at the School of Health Sciences, University of Minho and head of the multiple sclerosis clinic at Hospital de Braga, Portugal. During his PhD João was the first to demonstrate the importance of MR/GR balance in the regulation of prefrontal cortex structure and to identify in this region the morphological correlates of stress-induced behavioural disruption. As a clinician scientist, he has been deeply involved in clinical and translational research, focusing on strategies to overcome stress-related decision-making deficits as well as new approaches to diagnose and treat multiple sclerosis.

Manfred Hallschmid

Manfred Hallschmid is Professor of Behavioral Neurobiology at the Department of Medical Psychology of the University of Tübingen, Germany. He obtained his PhD in psychology/human biology in 2005 and received awards by the German Society of Psychology, the German Society of Endocrinology, and the German Diabetes Society. He is project leader in the collaborative research centre "Plasticity and Sleep" founded by the German Science Foundation. Manfred Hallschmid's primary research area is the central nervous regulation of metabolism in humans with a particular focus on the role of neuropeptidergic messengers, as well as the relationship between sleep, nutrition and cognition.

Patrice Cani

Patrice Cani is researcher from the FRS-FNRS in Belgium and group leader in the Metabolism and Nutrition lab at the Louvain Drug Research Institute (UCL, Brussels, Belgium) since 2009. He is visiting Professor at the Imperial College London and co-director of the European Associated Laboratory "NeuroMicrobiota" (France/Belgium). Professor Cani is an investigator WELBIO and recipient of an ERC-Starting-Grant in 2013.



His main research interests are the investigation of gut microbiota-host interactions and specific biological systems such as the endocannabinoid-system and the innate immune system in the context of obesity, type 2 diabetes and metabolic inflammation.

Sander Galjaard

Sander Galjaard is a researcher at the University Hospital Leuven in Belgium and investigates what physical measurements of the unborn fetus can predict overweight at birth, also called neonatal adiposity. Sander is working in one of Europe's referral centers for fetal therapy as a research fellow in the department of Gynecology and Obstetrics. He has been trained as a prenatal specialist in two academic centers in the Netherlands. His PhD at KU Leuven concerns the fetal development and neonatal outcome in the pregnant women with obesity and in the pregnancy complicated by (gestational-) diabetes. He is currently involved in the EU-funded DALI Project with the aim to prevent gestational diabetes in the pregnant women with obesity through lifestyle interventions and vitamin D.

Gianluca Tognon

Gianluca Tognon is an Italian biologist, specializing in human nutrition and experienced in epidemiology. He works as researcher and teacher at the university of Gothenburg (Sweden) where he relocated in 2010. Gianluca's main research area is the Mediterranean diet and its effects on health. In Italy he teaches at the master of human nutrition at the university of Pavia. He is author and co-author of several scientific publications and he has published five books. His blog, The Food & Nutrition Forum is published in four languages: English, Italian, Swedish and French.

Joao Breda

Joao Breda is the Programme Manager: Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Noncommunicable diseases and Health Promotion Division at WHO Regional Office for Europe. He is responsible for providing support to the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region on the implementation of the European Charter on Counteracting Obesity and the Vienna Declaration on Nutrition and Noncommunicable Diseases as well as evaluating their progress implementation. His team is leading for the largest and most comprehensive childhood obesity surveillance mechanisms globally and developing at the moment a new Food and Nutrition Action Plan and a Physical Activity Strategy for the WHO European Region.

Maria Hassapidou

Maria Hassapidou is Professor of Nutrition and Dietetics in the department of Nutrition and Dietetics of the Alexander Technological Educational Institution of Thessaloniki in Greece. She is also director and vice-president of the research committee of the Human Nutrition Laboratory. She has coordinated and/or participated in several European research projects, the research committee of ATEI, the Greek Ministries of Health, Education, Research and Technology, food and pharmaceutical companies, in the areas of dietary assessment and nutritional evaluation, dietary treatment of patients with obesity and childhood obesity.



Stefan Storcksdieck genannt Bonsmann

Stefan Storcksdieck works at the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's in-house science service. There he joined the Nutrition team within the Public Health Policy Support Unit as Scientific Project Officer in May 2013. Stefan holds an MSc equivalent in Nutrition and Household Economics from Justus-Liebig-University Giessen, Germany, and a PhD in Human Nutrition from ETH Zurich, Switzerland. From 2008 to 2013, he was employed first as Nutrition Communications Manager and then as Nutrition & Health Projects Manager at the European Food Information Council (EUFIC) in Brussels. At the JRC, Stefan is focussing on school food standards across Europe, coordinating the JRC input to the EU project PATHWAY-27, and supporting other projects of the Nutrition group.

Violeta Iotova

Violeta Iotova is Professor in Pediatrics at Varna Medical University (MUV), and the Chair of the State Commission for Pediatric Endocrinology Degree Award. Her recent work is in the field of general and abdominal obesity. Other research topics include childhood diabetes, growth, endocrine effects of small birth size, and rare diseases. She is the MUV Principal Investigator for the ToyBox Project and for the Horizon 2020 Feel4Diabetes. She is hosting international postgraduate course in pediatric diabetes and endocrinology every two years and is a member of several international professional societies. Dr. Iotova is the Secretary of ESPE Clinical Fellowship Committee since 2011.

Anne de Looy

Anne was the first ever Professor of Dietetics in the UK and now based at the University of Plymouth. She is currently the President of European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD). As a member of a number of European Committees Anne has a keen interest in the European Health Professions agenda. Anne coordinated two EU funded Thematic Network for Dietitians. The Networks linked over 120 Partner institutions together across 31 countries in Europe including international associates. In 2005 Anne was made an Honorary Fellow of the British Dietetic Association and in 2012 Founding Fellow of the Association for Nutrition. Her research interest is managing dietary intake of adolescents and the professionalization of dietetics.

For more information:

ECO2014 in Sofia, Bulgaria - [Official congress Abstract Book](#)

ECO2011 in Istanbul, Turkey - Podcast

[ECO2012 in Lyon, France - Podcast](#)

[ECO2013 in Liverpool, UK - Podcast](#)

[ECO2015 Prague, Czech Republic - Official website](#)

[European Association for the Study of Obesity \(EASO\)](#)