

Editorial

GTH 2021: The First Online Experience! Useful for Future Meetings?

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Hämostasologie 2021;41:100–102.

For the GTH, the 2021 Congress has been the first online experience. We all hope that it will remain the only one but as of today, we cannot be sure of this. Moreover, there may be some features of an online congress worth keeping in future face-to-face meetings. In his companion Editorial, Professor Rüdiger E. Scharf addresses the lessons from virtual scientific congresses for the post-COVID-19 era.¹ Looking back specifically at the GTH 2021 Congress, some aspects appear to have been particularly appreciated and the following considerations may be useful for shaping future GTH congresses, either online or hybrid.

First, **the opportunity to listen to scientific sessions “on demand”**. Several attendees highlighted the utility of this feature. Digital presentations solve the problem of not being able to attend parallel sessions that appear to be equally interesting. The online format allows to enjoy quietly outstanding lectures and to stop the flow of words for considering a particularly difficult reasoning or an illuminating wording. It also allows watching some sessions and discussing their contents with our teams at our best convenience. However, there are some problems with “on demand” sessions that need to be addressed. While “live” scientific lectures are rather easily accredited, “on demand” webcasts – according to the accreditation board – may have to satisfy following criteria: (i) The speakers must sign a form excluding any conflict of interest; (ii) Two independent referees must pre-review the lectures and certify that they are scientifically sound and devoid of any commercial message; (iii) To be awarded with the credits for each session, the attendees have to correctly answer at least 7 out of 10 multiple-choice questions. I leave you the pleasure of doing the math for the ~136 scientific contributions of the GTH 2021 Congress.

Another issue are the live Q&A sessions, which can be enlightening and deepen the message of the lectures but

bear the risk of bloopers, embarrassing mistakes one does not wish to be recalled “on demand.” For the GTH 2021 we decided to cut them off, keeping online only the lectures, which had been pre-recorded and validated by the speakers. Finally, there is the question of accessibility: shall “on demand” scientific sessions be open only to registered congress participants or be made available free of charge to a larger audience? Moreover, in the latter case, why should one pay the meeting fees if she or he will be able to watch all the contents later on? Obviously, there are several combinations of parameters (variable charges and timing of free availability) to answer this point. This is definitely a matter of discussion for future GTH Congress Presidents and the GTH Council.

The second opportunity is **the wider audience that can be reached by an online meeting**. Participants, who otherwise would not have had the possibility to come to Lausanne, could attend the GTH 2021 Congress. For instance, students without financial support for travelling and accommodation; participants from countries with low-to-middle income economies or the need for visas; colleagues interested in only specific topics (e.g., the State of the Art sessions on hepatology or obstetrics, or the Master Class dedicated to artificial intelligence in research). Particularly, interactive Master Classes, which in my opinion should preferentially target young colleagues and students, could be an interesting feature to be maintained as online “live” events in future face-to-face GTH Congresses. In this regard, a crucial issue to consider are the costs of hybrid sessions. The technical and human requirements for recoding a session to stream it “live” are high. Probably, the way to go would be to offer on-site, face-to-face lectures and separate, online-only “live” interactive events.

Third, the online format has the potential to improve **accessibility and discussion of the posters**. In fact, even in a face-to-face meeting, despite the unbeatable advantage

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Georg Thieme Verlag KG,
Rüdigerstraße 14,
70469 Stuttgart, Germany

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1055/a-1441-6233>.
ISSN 0720-9355.

Received

March 16, 2021

Accepted

March 16, 2021

of meeting the authors in person, “poster walks” have frequently been suboptimal. There is background noise; on the other side of the poster wall, another group is discussing loudly; the authors summarize their work indulging in too many details and thus eroding the time for questions; two interesting posters are discussed simultaneously and afterwards the author of the second poster has disappeared preventing interested delegates to ask questions. A virtual poster gallery offers several interesting opportunities: (i) The possibility to go through the posters and choose those to visit in person; (ii) An audio message detailing the work or a short and snappy “vocal abstract” highlighting its key concepts; (iii) A networking tool allowing interacting with the authors during the entire congress. All these features would complement a physical poster display. They can improve accessibility of the posters and allow identifying those that we are interested in discussing later with the author, face-to-face in the poster area.

A fourth potential advantage is **the possibility to attend an online congress from the working place**. The majority of the GTH 2021 participants did not take a week off but arranged the working schedule to attend selected lectures. Anticipating this, the Satellite Symposia (preferentially targeting clinicians) were scheduled during the lunch break and after working hours, Oral Communications (possibly more research-oriented) early and State of the Art (clinicians) later in the afternoon, leaving time slots for the Plenary Lectures as a junction in-between. However, while attending a meeting from the working place enables to be available for patients and colleagues, this is a challenge and quite distracting, bearing the risk of being neither here at work nor there at the congress.

This last issue touches on another chapter: **the interaction with the industry**, without whose financial support it would not be possible to hold scientific congresses as ours. The GTH 2021 Congress has taught us that an online meeting cannot substitute for a face-to-face one. During an online congress, we do not have the possibility to interact lively with other participants, to meet friends and talk science. Just simply, we are NOT there, on-site! This holds also true for the interaction with representatives of companies. The industry has to accept and consider this change of perspective.

During the GTH 2021 Congress, there have been very few “clicks” on the representatives’ avatars. In fact, the personal contacts and interactions with industrial partners were virtually inexistent. However, companies have had alternative ways to interact with the attendees and to share their messages: remember the informative brochures on display at the booths, the several industry videos available “on demand,” and in particular, the Satellite Symposia. Those with high quality contents have emerged as front-runners on the list of “on demand” requests, thus fostering a good image in favor of the organizing company. Online meetings shape new ways of sharing information between industry and medical professionals – novel ideas that will be valuable for complementing the offer of face-to-face meetings. In a nutshell, solid scientific information instead of beverages and liquid talks.

The COVID-19 era is a challenge. For the health care systems, for the economics, and particularly for our social

coexistence. In the relatively small and privileged world of scientific meetings, we can also take up the challenge and respond with creativity, developing new ideas and solutions. These will improve future, most likely hybrid congresses, combining the richness and pleasure of personal encounters with the advantages of digital opportunities.

Scientific Contents of this GTH 2021 Congress Issue

Several invited speakers have agreed to write a brief conceptual review article on the topic of their lectures. In this second GTH 2021 Congress issue, you will find six of them. **Fredenburgh and Weitz**² discuss factor XI as a target for new anticoagulants. This work highlights the game-changing possibility to achieve an efficacious anticoagulation without a significant increase of the bleeding risk. **Zaninetti and Thiele**³ have accepted the challenge to address the difficult balance between thrombotic and bleeding risks in patients with platelet disorders requiring anticoagulation. Their work is a systematic and practical guide, which will prove very useful for clinicians facing this therapeutic dilemma. **Ten Cate and Leader**⁴ didactically resume the pathophysiology and management of disseminated intravascular coagulation in the context of acute leukaemias. **Cognasse et al.**⁵ provide a thorough overview of the involvement of platelets in inflammation and immune responses. The authors summarize the metabolic and functional changes induced by production, processing, and storage of platelet concentrates, focusing on the possible effects in the transfusion recipients. The final contributions introduce us to two novel aspects of platelet function. **Gresele et al.**⁶ open our eyes wide on biochemistry and emerging functional impact of matrix metalloproteases on platelets. **Podoplelova et al.**⁷ deepen our knowledge on mechanisms guiding platelet procoagulant response, an essential component of platelet activation increasingly recognized in recent years.

As usual, a couple of technical data for concluding. On average, 4 potential reviewers have been asked (range 4 to 5); the first round of review lasted 31 days (22 to 46); the total time between first submission and acceptance was 65 days (32 to 113). The valuable work performed “backstage” by the reviewers and the various teams of “*Hämostaseologie – Progress in Haemostasis*” enables us to enjoy a further series of excellent conceptual reviews on lectures held during the GTH 2021 Congress.

The Lausanne meeting is still alive: you can have access “on demand” via www.gth2021.org.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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