

## History of the Belgian Week of Gastroenterology on the occasion of its XXth manifestation in 2008

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### Introduction

The development of Gastroenterology in Belgium and abroad has been greatly stimulated by Georges Brohée (1887-1957) who founded the “Société Belge de Gastro-entérologie” in 1928 and its journal “Le Journal belge de gastro-entérologie” in 1933 (1,2). As Georges Brohée was a surgeon, working with a team including two internists and one radiologist, he always recommended a multidisciplinary approach to this important branch of medicine. He was also impassioned with promoting gastroenterology through international contacts and in 1935 he was able to organise the first International Congress of Gastroenterology in Brussels. He also founded the “Société Internationale de Gastro-entérologie” (SIGE), which pursued the organisation of biennial international congresses.

After World War II, G. Brohée, with European colleagues belonging to the “Association des Sociétés Internationales et Méditerranéennes de Gastroentérologie (ASNEMGE), organised an European Congress of Gastroenterology every 2 years. Moreover the SIGE was replaced by the «Organisation Mondiale de Gastro-entérologie» (OMED) and a first World Congress of Gastroenterology in Washington DC was planned in 1958. Unfortunately G. Brohée could not attend this congress. As a tribute to Brohée’s efforts, a G. Brohée lecture is presented at each World congress, as did J.B. Kirsner in Los Angeles in 1994 (3).

In Belgium, monthly meetings of the Société Belge de Gastro-entérologie were scheduled, the corresponding journal being named “Acta Gastro-enterologica Belgica”. When André Delcourt succeeded in 1968 to Joseph Massion as secretary-general, three-monthly meetings on a theme with a yearly free-papers session were organised (2). Meanwhile, Jan De Groote founded the “Vlaamse Vereniging voor Gastroenterologie” in 1954 (4). As digestive endoscopy revolutionised the practice of Gastroenterology, a Belgian Society of Digestive Endoscopy was created in the seventies following the impetus of Michel Cremer and his colleagues. Basic and clinical research could also be presented and discussed within two research groups created by the National Foundation of Scientific Research: “Digestive secretions and motility” and “Hepatology (Liver)”.

In 1978, for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “Société Belge de Gastro-entérologie”, A. Delcourt set up a meeting in collaboration with the Vlaamse Vereniging voor Gastroenterologie (VVGE), the Belgian Society of Digestive Endoscopy (BSDE), the Royal Belgian Society of Surgery (RBSS) and the Royal Belgian Society of Radiology (RBSR). Thereafter, a yearly “Five Societies Meeting” was organised with a different theme each year. Charles Dive succeeded to André Delcourt as secretary-general in 1982. The «Société Belge de Gastro-entérologie» was renamed «Société Royale Belge de Gastro-entérologie» (SRBGE). He suggested to the “Société Française de Gastro-entérologie” to organise together with the SRBGE the “Journées Francophones de Gastroentérologie” in Brussels. The anonymous selection of the free papers for this important meeting foreseen in 1985 was done with the collaboration of members of the board of administrators of the SRBGE.

### Joint meetings of Gastroenterology (Brussels 1987, Knokke 1988)

In 1986, Pierre Barbier, new secretary-general, and the members of the board of administrators of the SRBGE regretted that there were too many “digestive meetings” in Belgium, sometimes 2 meetings in a day. Therefore, I was asked to contact Jan De Groote, secretary-general of the VVGE, in order to plan a national meeting, possibly with the other digestive societies and with the research groups. Jan De Groote put forward the idea to organise a steering committee with representatives of the VVGE, the SRBGE and the BSDE.

At the steering committee of May 13<sup>th</sup> 1986 it was agreed to reduce the number of meetings organised by each Society and to create a “Joint meeting of Gastroenterology” with presentation of free papers selected anonymously by a Committee of 2 representatives from each of the three Societies, following the method used for the “Journées Francophones”. On the

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basis of the sums of anonymous scores given by the members of the Selection Committee, the corresponding original studies would be presented as oral communications or posters. This policy of selection would stimulate the quality of original studies and of their presentations. The language used would be Dutch, or French, or English with the slides written in English. As Editor-in-chief of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica* I recommended to edit the selected abstracts written in English (British spelling) for the joint meeting.

The first Joint Meeting was held in Brussels on February 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> 1987 (Uccle Cultural Centre). There were 35 oral presentations selected and 66 posters, with an attendance of 200. The second Joint Meeting was held at the Casino of Knokke on February 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> 1988, where attractive meeting rooms were available as well as the famous Magritte room ("Le Domaine Enchanté") for the lunches. Besides selected oral communications and posters, there were three invited lectures. The administrative organisation of both meetings was performed by Mr Henri Van Leemputten and his wife. The expenses were covered by the sponsoring of several drug and instrument companies organising a technical exhibition, a modest contribution being requested from participants.

### First Belgian Week of Gastroenterology (Liège 1989)

At the steering committee of March 7<sup>th</sup> 1988 at the University Foundation in Brussels, there was a consensus to merge the next Joint Meeting of the three Societies with the Five Societies symposium on a theme already mentioned, and with the meetings of the Research Groups "Hormones and motility" organised by Théo Peeters and "Liver" organised by the late Jacques Versieck. This meeting was called "*Belgian Week of Gastroenterology*" (BWGE) and was foreseen in Liège from Thursday March 2<sup>nd</sup> to Saturday March 4<sup>th</sup> 1989 in the "Palais des Congrès". I was in charge of the scientific coordination of the Joint meeting and the coordination of the BWGE with the different moderators and leaders of specific meetings ("Organising Committee"). The editing of the corresponding abstracts in the congress issue of *Acta Gastro-Enterologica Belgica*, with the administrative support of Mr and Mrs H. Van Leemputten, was also one of my responsibilities. The composition of the Selection Committee would include representatives of the Societies of Surgery and Radiology. The theme of the Five Societies symposium to be organised by the VVGE was chosen by J. De Groote: "Bile ducts".

A first study group was created at the suggestion of P. Barbier: "Digestive Radiology".

There were about 300 medical doctors who attended this first BWGE. At the Joint Meeting, there were 40 selected oral communications and 76 selected posters,

and 56 oral communications presented at the research groups and the Five Societies symposium.

### Subsequent Belgian Weeks of Gastroenterology (BWGEs)

At the following Steering Committees, it was decided to carry on with organising the BWGEs, at the end of each winter, before the "Journées Francophones" usually held in March in France and before the Digestive Disease Weeks (DDW), usually held in May in the USA. The presentation of an abstract at the BWGE could be also proposed later at the DDW following the regulations of the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA). Initially it was decided to alternate the locations of the BWGEs in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, respectively (Table 1), but in 1994, following a poll of the delegates in Knokke, the majority preferred to pursue the BWGE in this attractive City and Casino. The attendance rose to 300 delegates in 1995 and 502 in 1999. As the owners of the Knokke Casino have changed in 2003 and undertook restoring works, the BWGEs were organised in other cities. After a close collaboration with me for the organisation of the BWGE in 2002 as deputy-coordinator, Pierre Deprez accepted to be in charge of the scientific coordination of the next BWGEs, and together with Isabelle Colle for the BWGE 2008. He benefited of the administrative support of Mr H. Van Leemputten until 2004 and thereafter from the administrative support of Mrs H. Stienlet, Mrs G. Verkens and Mrs A-F De Meyer.

There were five participating societies at the first BWGE in Liège and each Society was successively responsible of the organisation of the Five Societies Symposium on a theme held at each Saturday of the BWGE. In 1995, the Research Group "Digestive secretions and motility" was renamed "Gastrointestinal regulatory mechanisms" under the patronage of OG-NFWO ("Onderzoek Gemeenteschap-Nationaal Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek") with Theo Peeters as chairman. In 1996, the research group "Liver" of the

Table 1. — Location of the successive Belgian Weeks of Gastroenterology

1989	LIEGE	1999	KNOKKE
1990	BRUSSELS	2000	KNOKKE
1991	KNOKKE	2001	KNOKKE
1992	NAMUR (WEPION)	2002	KNOKKE
1993	BRUSSELS	2003	BRUGES
1994	KNOKKE	2004	BRUGES
1995	KNOKKE	2005	SPA
1996	KNOKKE	2006	OSTEND
1997	KNOKKE	2007	OSTEND
1998	KNOKKE	2008	ANTWERP

Table 2. — Themes chosen by the respective societies for the 6 Societies Symposia

1989 VVGE	Bile ducts	1999 VVGE	Barrett's oesophagus
1990 SRBGE	Hazards of GI diagnostic and therapeutic procedures	2000 SRBGE	Controversies in Gastroenterology
1991 RBSS	Changing patterns in the treatment of oesophageal diseases	2001 RBSS	New trends in the treatment of GI cancer
1992 RBSR	Trends in diagnostic imaging and interventional procedures of the liver	2002 RBSR	Cost effectiveness and economic impact of new imaging techniques and treatments of the hepato-biliary system
1993 BSDE	Management of iatrogenic lesions	2003 BSDE	Multidisciplinary approach to digestive diseases : rectal cancer, chronic pancreatitis and GI bleeding
1994 VVGE	GI infections	2004 VVGE	Recent advances in the management of IBD
1995 SRBGE	Screening of GI diseases-Therapeutic impact	2005 SRBGE	Unresolved issues in hepatogastroenterology
1996 RBSS	GI haemorrhage	2006 BASL	Emergencies in hepatology
1997 RBSR	Algorithms of morphological investigations in hepato- gastroenterology	2007 RBSS	Actual topics in oncologic digestive surgery
1998 BSDE	GI polyps	2008 SC	Innovations in digestive diseases : state of the art 2008

VVGE = Vlaamse Vereniging voor Gastroenterologie ; SRBGE = Société Royale Belge de Gastro-entérologie ; RBSS = Royal Belgian Society of Surgery ; RBSR = Royal Belgian Society of Radiology ; BSDE = Belgian Society of Digestive Endoscopy ; BASL = Belgian Association for the Study of the Liver ; SC = Steering Committee.

Scientific Research Foundation was replaced by the "Spring Meeting of the Belgian Association of the Study of the Liver (BASL)" under the impetus of the late Marc Hautekeete. In 2004, the BASL was adopted as the sixth Society participating to the Joint Meeting Selection Committee and to the sequential organisation of the Six Societies Symposium on a theme.

As already mentioned, besides existing research or study groups invited to the BWGEs ("Parenteral and enteral nutrition", "Belgian Group of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition", Belgian IBD Research Group, Belgian Helicobacter pylori Study group, Belgian Transplantation Society, Belgian Group of Digestive Endosonography, Research Group of the "Vlaamse Vereniging voor Klinische Voeding and Metabolim"(VVKVM), the "Société Belge de Nutrition Clinique", the Belgian Group of Digestive Oncology (BGDO)) new study or research groups have been created at the BWGEs : the Gastro-intestinal Pathology Club in 1990, the Belgian Liver Intestinal Committee, the Belgian Pancreatic Club and the Belgian Videocapsule Group in 2005.

Many foreign lecturers have been invited at the different meetings of the BWGEs , including in 2001 two famous surgeons from Japan, Drs K. Maruyama and Dr O. Ishikawa. The list of the themes chosen by these 6 societies is indicated in Table 2.

Prizes for young investigators (< 40 years) have been foreseen for the best communications at the Joint Meeting on the basis of the scores of the Joint Meeting Selection Committee and the quality of presentation : prize for the best communication in basic sciences, prize for the best communication in clinical sciences and prize for the best communication related to IBD, the latter being financed by 2 patient's associations : "Association Crohn-RCUH" and "Crohn & Colitis ulceroosa Vereniging". The biennial Georges Brohée Prizes have

also been presented after a didactic lecture of the winner. More and more delegates from neighbouring countries have attended the meetings of the BWGEs, especially the research meeting on "Gastro-intestinal regulatory mechanisms". The experience of the members of the steering and organising committees in designing the successive BWGEs was the basis of planning early in 1995 with Michel Cremer the organisation of the United European Gastroenterology Week in Brussels in 2000, which had a great success.

In conclusion, the history of the Belgian Weeks of Gastroenterology demonstrates that the union of the different Belgian Societies and Research Groups interested in digestive diseases offered a continuous and efficient stimulus for innovations and teaching how to apply from bench to bedside the new technical and pharmacological discoveries. The organisation of these weeks was rendered possible by the sponsoring of the drug and instrument companies which respected the rules of good practice, particularly the courses of the different morning and afternoon scientific meetings. I wish to thank J. Dierckens and C. Mostin (Smith-Kline-Beecham, then GSK) for their help in preparing the abstracts of the BWGEs for their editing, as well as the numerous sponsors, especially Astra-Zeneca.

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