

Authorities, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all still cherish in our mind and our heart the previous Congress in Astana (Kazakhstan), rich of emotions tied to the tribute we paid thereby to our beloved Nikolai Storozhenko, as well as of countless interesting and highly qualified professional ideas.

Thank-you again, Vice President Sholpan Bulekbaeva!

And so herewe are, in a Region – Sardinia – that is also referred to as “heaven on earth”, and in a very special venue – the Forte Village Resort – a haven of beautiful nature and high professional merit, for a real and practical confrontation on very topical issues, including “Thermae and Medical Wellness. Integration between Science, Economy, and Tourism,” at the focus of our 68th FEMTEC Congress.

The event enjoys the valuable support of the Italian Ministry of Health and the technical input of the WHO, in that FEMTEC is accredited with this outstanding international Agency.

First of all I wish to welcome and thank all the Delegates, Directors, and Board Members representing over 18 countries for their participation and support to our initiatives.

Please also allow me to express my personal thanks to Lorenzo Giannuzzi, CEO and General Manager of the Forte Village Resort, someone who knows how to improve what is just perfect as such. He understood the rationale of this event – not business but method – and supported it by involving his best co-workers. My esteem and appreciation also go to Angelo Cerina, one of the inventors of the SPA, an outstanding physician and, particularly, a friend and a business partner for almost two decades, who always supported our ideas and proposals with his team, not just on behalf of FEMTEC but particularly of the Milan State University. This is, in fact, where the clinical labs of the first Centre for Research on Thalassotherapy of the Milan University were established.

WELCOMING REMARKS BY THE AUTHORITIES

I now wish to pass the floor to the Heads of Delegations for brief welcoming remarks.

As mentioned, the theme of the Congress “Thermae and Medical Wellness. Integration between Science, Economy and Tourism” addresses the business referred to the great European tradition of the thermal culture (our traditional medicine, according to the definition of the WHO) on one hand and the Anglo-Saxon vision of the use of balneotherapy on the other.

One possible question is: can both “models” be integrated or, at least, can they coexist by supporting one another, also in the light of the current major social, economic, and environmental transformations? We think we can answer in the affirmative.

The current demographic and epidemiological structure, characterized by an ageing population and by the increase in chronic disorders, has imposed on the NHS to review its organization, changing the traditional way of practising medicine from “waiting” for diseases to appear to a medicine that “takes the initiative” with emphasis on preventing the on set of disorders and their chronicity. Medical hydrology has an important role in this very sphere because it offers a diversified array of secondary and tertiary prevention measures for the many disorders that benefit from SPA treatments, and because it plays an important role in delimiting or delaying the development of severe conditions that entail the loss of self-sufficiency and in preventing the on set or worsening of disorders.

Mrs. ANNI HOOD is the representative of an outstanding Institution, attending our Congress for the first time. Every year, the Global Wellness Institute (US/UK) drafts the authoritative World Wellness Report, and will provide its documented and updated point of view in this respect.

We continue to demolish – either deliberately or as a self-controlled process – the foundations of traditional hydrology, rooted in our societies and/or in national health systems, however without finding any viable alternatives so far.

Perhaps this is the main purpose of this Congress – perform a rational and critical analysis of the current status and suggest new options. These should not be emergency solutions for emergency conditions, but rather NEW MODELS. In short, govern and manage change.

A Chinese proverb or, rather, a “curse” says: may you live in times of change.

Right, it's hard to live and work in such times, but it is in these times that the dynamism and impact of an institution are most visible.

FEMTEC takes this tough challenge, which needs people, means and, most of all, ideas.

We are already working!

Therefore I would like to briefly summarize our recent activities and thank those that provided their intellectual and material input: the St. Petersburg Declaration (Russia); the Thermal Communication Charter; the Thermal Communication Charter as related to social networks (Italy) and e-marketing (Italy and Tunisia); the guidelines for qualification of Thalassotherapy Centres (Tunisia); training courses on Health Tourism (Russia, Academy of Tourism); the Hydroglobe project defining a reference framework for balneotherapy (in cooperation with FoRST, Italy); summary and disclosure of clinical studies (Afreth, CNETH); cooperation with Specialist Research Centres (Romania, Cuba) and outstanding institutions (ISMH, Polish Balneology Association); development of public/private management relations, with creation of “health clusters” in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO).

Lastly the project/paper HYDROLIFE, dedicated to Hydration, sees FEMTEC promote an Italian national day of Hydration to be launched at European level.

All the above is collected and posted in a modern website, which is quickly gaining appreciation and popularity (www.femteconline.org).

Moreover, during the Congress, new practical and strategic proposals will be submitted for your review and approval. These include, in particular:

1. TOWARDS ACTIVE THERMALISM. The current demographic and epidemiological structure, characterized by an ageing population and by an increase in chronic disorders, has imposed on the NHS to review its organization, changing the traditional way of practising medicine **from "waiting" for diseases to appear to a medicine that "takes the initiative"** with emphasis on preventing the on set of disorders and their chronicity. But not only that. Consumers need to be involved in decisions and processes in the thermal and wellness sector.

The above observations lead to the idea and proposal to create the **European Association of Patients and Users of Health SPA Centres**, in order to leverage on the human capital of millions of people directly involved in producing ideas and proposals based on the pillars of **scientific research** (base, clinical, and wellbeing evaluation), communicated appropriately and responsibly to users

through the traditional press and the social media; accredited **training** of physicians and health-technical operators; technological **innovation** and health **safety**; **health governance** implemented through updated social thermalism formats (including private insurance agreements).

2. The innovative project UNISALUTE and the role of integrating health funds for development of thermal services, also in relation to the future reduction of the NHS contributions to the thermal sector.

One important lever for revival and promotion of the thermae – as shown by the German and Austrian experience – is the opportunity to use instruments other than public funds to support health demand. Integrating health funds and the UNIPOL project can play a significant role in this respect, particularly in defining “tailor-made packages” in consideration to changing demands for thermal services and, at the same time, in participating in the prevention “pipeline”, upon agreement with the local health authorities.

3. The World Thermalism Forum (Senyang, China), an example of international focused contribution to the appropriate development of an outstanding activity in the thermal tourist sector, to be integrated scientifically.

CHTA, one of the most proactive Members of the Federation, was a strong promoter of this project, being aware that only by improving the quality of the supply can the important health tourism market be preserved and promoted.

4. The digital exhibition “Thermalism in history and society.”
5. The setting-up of a “Euro-Mediterranean” centre for advanced training on thalassotherapy and wellbeing medicine (Tunis, Sardinia).

The Ministry of health of Tunisia, in fact, has invested a significant amount of resources in this business and the country is now a world leader with high-prestige facilities that obviously require qualified staff and organization updates.

6. Follow-up and initiatives aimed at climate characterization for therapeutic use and revival of studies on climate/health relations.
7. The Project “Thermae & Diplomacy. The thermae as learning and meeting points for people and countries to build history” (from Charles the Great to Yalta).

And much more!

Dear Friends and Colleagues, we are therefore moving towards the 70th FEMTEC Congress, an important and significant milestone in the long journey of the World Federation of Hydrotherapy and Climatotherapy.

I wish to close with this quote, which is often used in motivational courses for managers:

Three men were working in a construction site. They had the same task but, if asked about their job, their answers were different: “I break stones” said the first. “I earn a living” said the second. “I participate in the construction of a cathedral” said the third.

The latter is the one FEMTEC intends to identify with!

Enjoy the event!