

Conference report

Portuguese Association for Ambulatory Surgery 2000

Enthusiastically supported by the International Association for Ambulatory Surgery (IAAS), the Portuguese Association of Ambulatory Surgery (APCA) was constituted in September 1998. Its basic aim was to develop high quality ambulatory surgery programmes in both public and private Portuguese hospitals. In June 2000 APCA had 170 members representing different health groups, surgeons, anaesthetists, nurses, managers and economists. Two corporate members also joined APCA.

There was a tremendous lack of information about day surgery amongst all the partners involved in the Portuguese Health Care System. Different definitions, different concepts and doubts about the organisational aspects needed for the development of high quality ambulatory surgery programmes, makes all the data available from Portuguese hospitals unreliable for comparisons with data from other countries. The Portuguese Health Institute of Finance and Management ('Instituto de Gestão Informática e Financeira da Saúde', IGIF) showed us a 10.4% of day surgery rate for the 18 basket procedures selected by C. De Lathouwer and J.P. Poullier in the 1994–1995 International IAAS Survey [1]. Still, there are very few day surgery units in Portuguese Hospitals.

With a population of 9.5 million, Portugal spends much more on healthcare than the European Community's national average (8.2% in relative terms to its Gross National Product, in 1998). Its shortage of financial resources added to a shortage of health professionals (specially nurses and doctors in some specialities such as anaesthesiology) and an increasing surgical waiting list (nearly 100 000 patients in 1999) makes Portugal a European country that should seriously implement high quality programmes in the field of ambulatory surgery.

Bearing this in mind and being aware of the advantages of day surgery that we all recognise, APCA undertook the enormous task to raise awareness of and interest in, the importance of ambulatory surgery among all healthcare partners.

During 1999, APCA participated in the International Terminology for Ambulatory Surgery promoted by the

IAAS members Lindsay Roberts and John Warden and proposed the Portuguese translation and adaptation to our health system. Relying on this document APCA started to involve the Health Ministry and its Public Institutions (General Health Direction, Health Institute of Finance and Management, Quality Health Institute, Design and Health Equipment Institute) in team meetings to discuss, advise, legislate and regulate the development of high quality ambulatory surgery programmes in Portugal.

A Portuguese database on ambulatory surgery is now beginning to function. APCA challenged the 73 most important Portuguese hospitals to nominate one interlocutor each to APCA who should be the person responsible to inform and to answer APCA surveys. We hope to have reliable data on ambulatory surgery in 2002.

Owing to the large number of national journals in the health field in a small country with few writers, APCA initially felt that the best way to inform the health professionals would be by publishing some issues on day surgery in these journals. In conjunction with the Portuguese Society of Anaesthesiology (SPA), APCA published a thematic issue on Ambulatory surgery which was distributed to all Portuguese anaesthetists and APCA members. Unfortunately this interesting way to promote the concept of day surgery was not successful with other journals. Consequently, APCA decided to publish the Portuguese Journal of Ambulatory Surgery ('Revista Portuguesa de Cirurgia Ambulatória'). The first issue will be printed at the end of 2000. The Portuguese Journal will be written in Portuguese or English (according to the paper) with the summary in both languages. One issue will be published each year. The Editor-in-Chief, can be contacted at the address below:

Dr Domingos Marques, Editor-Chefe da Revista Portuguesa de Cirurgia Ambulatória, Serviço de Anestesiologia, Hospital Geral de Santo António, 4099-001 PORTO, PORTUGAL, Fax — 351-22-2088115, e-mail: dmarques@anesthsa.min-saude.pt.

The major enterprise undertaken by APCA since its foundation was the organisation of the First National Congress on Ambulatory Surgery which took place in the North of Portugal, at Póvoa de Varzim, between

29th and 31st May 2000. The Portuguese Health Secretary was amongst more than 500 delegates.

The objectives of the Portuguese Congress were:

1. To raise the awareness of ambulatory surgery among public and private health authorities leading to the formulation of adequate national guidelines and policies.
2. To review the development of ambulatory surgery in a European context.
3. To establish fundamental protocols and guidelines in order to ensure the safe practice of ambulatory surgery.
4. To structure and co-ordinate national research, education and quality assurance.
5. To provide a multidisciplinary forum for the development of day surgery in Portugal.

The Congress participants took advantage of international expertise and know how from a group of European leaders in the field of ambulatory surgery. Hopefully this will raise enthusiasm for day surgery in Portugal.

After 3 days of sharing experiences, discussing procedures proposing guidelines, there was no doubt that

Portugal should develop ambulatory surgery in order to profit from its economic, clinical and social advantages. Developing an ambulatory surgery system will rationalise healthcare costs whilst maintaining the quality of care.

The Second National Congress on Ambulatory Surgery organised by APCA will be held in Lisbon between 6th and 8th May, 2002.

References

- [1] De Lathouwer C, Poullier JP. Ambulatory surgery in 1994–1995: the state of the art in 29 OECD Countries. *Ambul Surg* 1998;6:43–55.

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