

XI LATVIAN GASTROENTEROLOGY CONGRESS WITH INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPATION: GETTING BACK ON TRACK LIVE

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During the uncertain times of the COVID era, it was unclear how it would end and whether planning the next Latvian Gastroenterology Congress for 2021 remotely was feasible, or if large-scale events could be held in the future. Nevertheless, after two years, the XI Latvian Gastroenterology Congress with International Participation successfully convened in person on 9 December 2023, at the ATTA Convention Centre in Rīga, Latvia. This significant event nowadays, held every two years, is the largest of its kind in Eastern Europe and celebrated a milestone of 20 years in 2023. Over the past two decades, the congress has seen continual growth, drawing participants and speakers from across the globe.

From the beginning, the goal of the congress has been to update Latvian physicians on the newest trends and breakthroughs in both Latvian and international gastroenterology, featuring esteemed speakers from Latvia and other nations. This year's gathering saw attendees from Germany, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Israel, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania. Over the years, the congress has played a crucial role in enhancing the expertise of many Latvian healthcare professionals, especially in gastrointestinal medicine. This focus has substantially boosted the quality of care for patients with digestive tract conditions, receiving accolades from fellow medical professionals.

The congress was organised by two Latvian non-profit organisations — the Digestive Disease Society (*Gremošanas*

slimību biedrība) and the Gastroenterology Support Society (*Gastroenteroloģijas atbalsta biedrība*) in partnership with Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU), the Latvian Academy of Sciences, the Latvian Gastroenterology Association, and other leading national medical associations. Additionally, the congress was supported with informational resources from the Ministry of Health of Latvia and the World Gastroenterology Organisation. The Congress Scientific Committee was composed of opinion leaders from various countries, numbering 16 in total, which included representatives from the USA.

Although Latvia has only about 50 certified gastroenterologists, the event is becoming increasingly popular among professionals from various medical fields. This trend is reflected in the growing attendance numbers. The inaugural congress in 2003 attracted roughly 400 participants, but over the last ten years, the event has consistently drawn around 1000 healthcare specialists. In 2023, the attendance exceeded 1100 individuals. The congress enjoys popularity not only among doctors but has also become a favoured event for nurses, pharmacists, residents, students, and other healthcare professionals interested in the field of medicine.

The congress was formally inaugurated by Dr. Hosams Abu Meri, Latvian Minister of Health, Prof. Aigars Pētersons, Rector of RSU, and Professor Martina Müller-Schilling, who represented the United European Gastroenterology.



Fig. 1. Plenary meeting of the XI Latvian Gastroenterology Congress, 9 December 2023, Rīga.



Fig. 2. From the left: Prof. Dan Dumitrascu (Romania), Dr. Jeļena Deroņa (Latvia), Dr. med. Mette Julsgaard (Denmark), Prof. Peter C. Konturek (Germany), Prof. Juris Pokrotnieks (Latvia), Prof. Martina Müller-Schilling (Germany), Prof. Piotr Socha (Poland), Prof. Luigi Ricciardiello (Italy), Assoc. Prof. Heinz Hammer (Austria), Assoc. Prof. Aleksejs Deroņš (Latvia).

The congress has always showcased an extensive scientific agenda that included State-of-the-Art lectures, scientific presentations, and sectional sessions. Many of these sessions were moderated by a panel of international experts. Concurrently, the plenary session was complemented by a series of specialised satellite symposia held in a second hall, with a total of eight such events. Even young gastroenterology specialists had the chance to host their own satellite symposia during the Congress.

The Congress plenary session kicked off with a State-of-the-Art lecture titled “Towards a Human-AI Hybrid”, presented by Professor Juris Pokrotnieks (Latvia) and developed in collaboration with Professor Jurgis Šķilters (Latvia). This lecture explored recent advancements and

challenges in the application of AI in medicine. Additionally, Associate Professor Igors Ivanovs (Latvia) provided insights into current surgical trends. Worth noting are two lectures that offered contemporary perspectives: one by Professor Dan Dumitrascu (Romania) on new guidelines for esophageal manometry, and another by Associate Professor Heinz Hammer (Austria) discussing the identification of malabsorption syndrome in outpatients. Beyond traditional gastroenterology topics, this year’s congress also highlighted a range of themes, placing special focus on the following:

- **Challenges of the Gut-Brain Axis in Gastroenterology:** This topic was addressed in a rigorous discussion format known as “hard talk”, which brought together gastro-

enterologists and psychiatrists, particularly by Associate Professor Aleksejs Derovs (Latvia) and Professor Māris Taube (Latvia).

- **Rational Antibiotic Use in Gastroenterology and Anti-microbial Resistance:** This session covered the presentation of local clinical guidelines developed through collaboration with infectologists and family physicians. Additionally, it addressed other pertinent issues relevant to the practice of medicine in Latvia.
- **Inflammatory Bowel Diseases (IBD):** This topic was addressed with specific emphasis on the challenges faced during pregnancy, presented by *Dr. med.* Mette Julsgaard (Denmark), and issues related to infertility among IBD patients, presented by Associate Professor Aleksejs Derovs (Latvia). Additionally, Professor Rami Eliakim (Israel) delivered a lecture titled “Capsule endoscopy in established Crohn's disease: a panenteric approach.”
- **Rare Diseases:** A satellite symposium dedicated to rare liver diseases received official support from the European Reference Network for Rare Liver Diseases (ERN RARE-LIVER) and was held under the auspices of the European Commission. During this symposium, Professor Indra Zeltna (Latvia), Professor Piotr Socha (Poland), and Dr. Inita Kaže (Latvia) explored a range of topics including Wilson's disease, autoimmune hepatitis, and hepatobiliary disorders in children. The discussion panel featured Associate Professor Aleksejs Derovs (Latvia) and Dr. Valdis Ģibietis (Latvia), who represented the Latvian Gastroenterologists Association and the Latvian Association of Rare Disease Specialists, respectively.
- **Oncological Diseases of the Gastrointestinal Tract:** In this area, Professor Luigi Ricciardiello from Italy in the Main Hall discussed a report released by the United European Gastroenterology, which examined the impact of gastrointestinal cancer on the healthcare systems across the European Union. Following this, Professor Sandra Lejniece

from Latvia delivered a presentation on the advancements in the accreditation process at the Latvian Cancer Centre, aiming to meet the standards set by the Organisation of European Cancer Institutes (OEI).

- **Autoimmunity in Clinical Practice:** This segment included presentations by Assistant Professor Anda Kadiša (Latvia) with her talk “Beyond the Usual”, and Dr. Jeļena Derova (Latvia), who discussed a variety of complex clinical cases.
- **Challenges in Microbiota:** This topic was examined from various angles with presentations by gynaecologist Professor Dace Rezeberga (Latvia) and gastroenterologists Professor Peter C. Konturek (Germany) and Professor Vaidotas Urbonas (Lithuania).

The organisers were delighted to host a substantial exhibition featuring a wide array of local and international companies that were active throughout the day. It is important to recognise the crucial role that medical companies play in the field of medicine, particularly during the Congress. They provided essential assistance and information to delegates about the latest technological and pharmacological developments.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the event exceeded expectations and was a resounding success! On behalf of the Congress Organising Committee, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to the success of this Congress. Collaborations with numerous professional healthcare organisations, along with the significant contributions from respected lecturers and international guests, were key to the event's outstanding outcome. The support from various individuals and organisations was fundamental in both the planning and realisation of this remarkable collaborative endeavour.

Finally, we look forward to welcoming colleagues to the next XII Latvian Gastroenterology Congress in 2025.

XI LATVIJAS GASTROENTEROLOĢIJAS KONGRESS AR STARPTAUTISKU DALĪBU: ATGRIEŠANĀS KLĀTIENES PASĀKUMOS

2023. gada 9. decembrī ATTA centrā norisinājās nu jau XI Latvijas Gastroenteroloģijas kongress ar starptautisku dalību, kas pēc būtības ir unikāls pasākums visā Latvijas medicīnas vēsturē. Kongresam ir bagāta vēsture, nu jau 20 gadu garumā, tas tiek organizēts reizi divos gados un ir lielākais šīs jomas kongress visā Austrumeiropā. Kongresa mērķis ir informēt Latvijas ārstus par pēdējo gadu jaunumiem Latvijas un vispasaules gastroenteroloģijā, pieaicinot viedokļu veidotājus no Latvijas un citām valstīm — šogad viesojās viedokļu veidotāji no Vācijas, Itālijas, Austrijas, Dānijas, Izraēlas u.c. Kongresu organizē Gremošanas slimību biedrība kopā ar Gastroenteroloģijas atbalsta biedrību un sadarbībā ar Rīgas Stradiņa Universitāti, Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmiju, Latvijas Gastroenterologu asociāciju un ar citu vadošo valsts ārstu biedrību līdzdalību, kā arī ar LR Veselības Ministrijas un Pasaules Gastroenteroloģijas organizācijas informatīvo atbalstu.

Šogad padziļināta uzmanība tika veltīta: 1) gremošanas trakta onkoloģiskajām slimībām — šīs jomas ietvaros profesors no Itālijas Luidži Rikardjello komentēja Eiropas Gastroenteroloģijas asociācijas publicētu darbu par gremošanas trakta onkoloģisko slimību slogu un veselības sistēmu Eiropas savienībā; 2) iekaisīgajām zarnu slimībām; 3) retajām slimībām, un viens no satelīsimpozījumiem tika oficiāli atbalstīts no Eiropas referenču tīkla “Reto aknu slimību” puses, kas noris zem Eiropas komisijas patronāžas; 4) antimikrobiālajai rezistencei un jaunām vadlīnijām u.c. Paralēli plenārsēdei norisinājās vairāki specializēti satelīsimpozīji, kopumā astoņi.