Bridging Ethics and Innovation: SIMFER 2024 Charts the Future of Rehabilitation Medicine

The 52nd National Congress of the Italian Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine (SIMFER) was held in Padua from October 6-9, 2024, with the theme "Rehabilitation science and commitment in the community for a new ethics of rehabilitation."
Prof. Stefano Masiero (University of Padua) was the President of the Congress.
Here are some numbers:

- More than 1100 attendees
- 175 invited speakers
- More than 170 oral presentations
- More than 300 posters
- 64 exhibitors

The congress addressed a wide range of topics relevant to physical and rehabilitation medicine, including:
- Ethics in rehabilitation
- Artificial intelligence and new technologies in rehabilitation
- Neurological rehabilitation (stroke, spinal cord injuries, severe acquired brain injuries, neurodegenerative diseases)
- Musculoskeletal rehabilitation
- Cardiorespiratory rehabilitation
- Oncological rehabilitation
- Rehabilitation in developmental age
- Rehabilitation of the elderly
- Pain in rehabilitation
- Manual medicine and osteopathy
- Paralympic sports
- Governance and appropriateness in rehabilitation
- Telerehabilitation
- Prosthetics and orthotics
- Balneology and rehabilitation
- Interventional medicine in rehabilitation

The opening lecture Congress was delivered by Cardinal Pietro Parolin. His lecture was titled: "The ethical challenges of modern medicine between technology and solidarity."
Cardinal Pietro Parolin is the Vatican Secretary of State, His presence and lecture at the opening of this medical congress underscore the importance placed on ethical considerations in the practice of rehabilitation.
Among the main international speakers were:
- Helena Fordell (Sweden) on augmented and virtual reality in cognitive rehabilitation
- Henk Stam (Rotterdam) on ethical dilemmas in rehabilitation
- Olena Lazarieva (Ukraine) on rehabilitation of patients with gunshot wounds.

Many Italian experts gave keynote lectures and presentations, including among others:

- Carlo Maria Petrini (National Institute of Health, Rome) on ethics in rehabilitation
- Maria Gabriella Ceravolo (University of Ancona) on international educational standards in Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine
- Luigi Tesio (Statale University of Milan) on methodology in Rehabilitation
- Mauro Zampolini (Local Health Unit 2, Umbria) on Artificial Intelligence in Rehabilitation
- Giuseppe Massazza (University of Turin) on paralympic sports
- Roberto Casale (Piacenza) on disability and pain

The program also included:
- A Round table "Juniors and Seniors meet" on the future of Italian Rehabilitation;
- A special session for trainees with a total of 18 oral presentations from various specialization schools across Italy;
- A Joint SIMFER-INAIL (National Work Accidents Insurance Institute) session on rehabilitation and work reintegration after injury;
- Many joint sessions with other scientific societies: SIRN (Neurological Rehabilitation), SIN (Neurology), SINPIA (Childhood and Adolescence Neuropsychiatry), SIUD (Urodynamics);
- Sessions on new technologies, robotics, and artificial intelligence in rehabilitation;
- Sessions on clinical governance and appropriateness in rehabilitation.

Special prizes were delivered during the Congress:
PRM ITALY AWARD: to the three best papers presented by members of SIMFER aged less than 40 years;
MERZ Evolutox Prize: related to innovations or research in the field of botulinum toxin treatments, which are widely used in rehabilitation medicine;
B2pharma Prize: The theme of this prize was "Use and application of nutraceuticals in physiatry."

During the congress, elections were held for the new SIMFER Board. Prof. Giovanni Iolascon (Napoli) was elected as the new president, succeeding Dr. Giovanna Beretta (Milano), who will assume the role of past president.

Overall, the congress offered an important opportunity for updating and discussion for the Italian physiatric community, highlighting the ethical, clinical, and organizational challenges of modern rehabilitation, with a particular focus on technological innovation and hospital-territory integration.
The high number of oral presentations and posters indicates a strong emphasis on sharing current research and clinical experiences among the participants. This aligns with the Congress's goal of providing a platform for knowledge exchange and discussion of the latest developments in physical and rehabilitation medicine.

The next Congress of SIMFER will take place in NAPOLI, from November 23rd to 26th, 2025

Paolo Boldrini- ESPRM Ambassador for Italy