

On 30 January 2003, *Benecke N.I.* organised a meeting for internists and cardiologists, focussing on new developments in the fields of cardiology and vascular medicine. The symposium was chaired by the undersigned author, and was sponsored by an educational grant from Merck Sharp and Dome.

Six opinion leaders (three internists, two cardiologists and one molecular biologist) were asked to review the literature of 2002 and to select the most important publications within their fields of interest. The meeting was titled 'The Big Picture', symbolising the aim to make a sharp selection of important and relevant breakthroughs within the enormous amount of publications on cardiovascular medicine in 2002.

In the present era of evidence-based medicine, several important clinical trials with hard endpoints were extensively and critically discussed. These trials concerned classical risk factors for atherosclerosis such as hypertension (ALLHAT, LIFE, ANBP-2) and hypercholesterolaemia (HPS, PROSPER, ALLHAT-LIT), but also important issues as the management of haemostasis and thrombosis (ASPECT-2, CREDO), heart failure (COPERNICUS, Val-HeFT) and arrhythmias (AFFIRM, RACE, MADIT-II, MIRACLE). Fortunately, the programme was not restricted to the issue of evidence-based medicine, as all six opinion leaders also covered future perspectives by reviewing important publications on innovative new drugs and drug targets. Moreover, as an expert in molecular biology, one of the speakers was able to identify promising new molecular techniques within the field of cardiovascular medicine. In the forthcoming decades, these techniques may be introduced in the diagnostic and therapeutic approach to the patient with cardiovascular disease.

All contributions were of high interest and triggered fruitful discussions. The audience, the speakers and the organisers agreed that a symposium like this deserves a yearly update for several reasons. First, because new important publications on the discussed issues will arise every year. The second reason was that this first 'The Big Picture' symposium did not address the whole field of cardiovascular medicine. A yearly update would enable the organisers to focus on other risk factors next time, such as diabetes mellitus, insulin resistance, obesity or hyperhomocysteinaemia. And last but not least, a yearly update would contribute to an optimal communication between internists and cardiologists on the intriguing field of cardiovascular medicine.

The Netherlands Journal of Medicine, the journal of the Dutch Society of Internal Medicine, offers the opportunity to publish proceedings of high-quality meetings within the broad field of internal medicine. In this supplement, 'The Big Picture' symposium of 30 January 2003 is summarised by six interesting and independent contributions by opinion leaders in the field of cardiology and vascular medicine, covering topics from molecular aspects to evidence-based medicine. With this approach, the highlights discussed will reach a large proportion of the internists in the Netherlands. Further, the issue will be available on request to all medical doctors and scientists who are interested in the aforementioned fields.

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