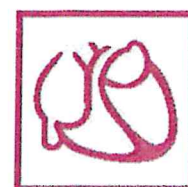


## German Cardiac Society: Its History

The evolution of the 90-year-old Society which now numbers 104 000 members is discussed by two Emeritus Fellows of the European Society of Cardiology



### Founding the Society

It all started on 3 June 1927 during an educational course in Bad Nauheim, when Prof. Bruno Kisch in a kind of 'sudden attack' announced the creation of the German Society for Circulation Research 'to advance circulation research in Germany'. Together with Prof. Arthur Weber, the founding was done within three minutes. But let us proceed step by step.

specialists in internal medicine. Weber, who was such a specialist, was well known in Germany and Europe for his research on the electrocardiogram, re-entrant tachycardia, phonocardiography, and radiography. He was one of the first to calculate the volume of the heart using radiographs. Weber was head of a Balneology Clinic in Bad Nauheim, Germany. His advanced educational courses on the heart in Bad Nauheim were considered a great success among other balneologists.

At that time, a controversy was raging across Europe concerning re-



Arthur Weber

Zeitschrift für Kreislaufforschung  
Zentralblatt für Herz- und Gefäßkrankheiten  
Herausgegeben von  
Prof. Dr. E. A. Mäurer und Prof. Dr. Bruno Kisch  
Heft 1, Jahrgang 1927

#### Begründung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Kreislaufforschung

Im Verlaufe eines Anlasses dieses Monats in Bad Nauheim  
abgehaltenen Anstaltens hat sich auf Anregung von Prof. Bruno  
Kisch eine deutsche Gesellschaft für Kreislaufforschung  
gegründet. Die Gesellschaft soll theoretischen und praktischen  
Arbeiten, sowie die ein besonderes Interesse an den Fragen des Kreislaufs  
haben, umfassen und in erster Linie der Vertiefung und gegen-  
seitigen Anregung theoretisch-wissenschaftlichen und praktisch-  
ärztlichen Lehrgängen und dessen Gelingen pflegen und fördern.  
Die erste Tagung der neuen Gesellschaft wird im März 1928  
stattfinden. Der Tagungsort wird noch bestimmt werden.  
Als Organ der Gesellschaft wurde die Zeitschrift für  
Kreislaufforschung bestimmt.  
Die vorstehenden Absätze für die erste Tagung liegen in  
den Händen von Prof. Bruno Kisch (Köln a. Rh.-Landesrat,  
Landesrat und Prof. A. Weber (Köln a. Rh.-Landesrat, Stadt-  
rat, Landrat, an die nach Anstellungen zum Reich in der  
neuen Gesellschaft zu wählen sind.  
Der Abdruck ist befreit RM 2.-

Founding of Deutsche  
Gesellschaft für Kreislaufforschung published  
in Zeitschrift für Kreislaufforschung (1927)



Bruno Kisch

Kisch, who worked in Cologne, Germany, at the Institute of Physiology, Biochemistry, and Pathological Physiology, can be considered as the driving force behind the founding of the German Society with Weber. Kisch was born in Prague in 1890, which at that time belonged to Austria. He was also interested in electrocardiography.

In those days, cardiology did not exist as a specialty in Germany. Rather, physicians interested in the heart and circulation were

entrant tachycardia. One group of physicians was in Vienna, Austria, and another group in the Netherlands. Weber invited them all to a meeting to discuss the issue. No one from either group was willing to accept the invitation. So, Weber became convinced that Germany should form its own Professional society.

There now appeared on the stage, the third key player in the creation of the Society:





Prof. Franz Maximilian Grödel, who headed the Department of Radiology at University of Frankfurt, Germany. Grödel also had a private clinic in Bad Nauheim and was specialized in circulation research and treating patients with heart attacks. He became a close friend of William G. Kerckhoff, an American millionaire of German origin from Chicago, IL, when Kerckhoff brought his

family to the spa at Bad Nauheim. Kerckhoff spent 1 million Gold Marks to create an institute for circulation research assuming the State of Hessen, where Bad Nauheim is located, would donate an additional amount. Today this is the highly reputed Kerckhoff Institute, a member of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft.

Grödel became head of the Clinical Department of the Institute. There was also an Experimental Department, headed by Prof. Eberhard Koch, later Secretary-General, and a Department of Prevention and Rehabilitation. One of the Kerckhoff Institute's most important patients was US President Theodore Roosevelt, who liked the spa at Bad Nauheim.

Grödel was Jewish from his mother's side but had converted to Roman Catholicism. Nevertheless, he was considered by the Nazis to be a Jew. Thus, he was forced to flee Germany and stayed in the USAs from 1934 until his death in 1950. While there, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and he became friends. Because the President suffered from polio, he was interested in the spa system and asked Grödel to create a spa in Saratoga Springs. Unfortunately, Grödel did not succeed because the governor of the State of New York disapproved of activities by Jewish immigrants.

It is worth noting that Grödel and Kisch—the latter also emigrated from Germany in 1938—together with other immigrants founded the American College of Cardiology in 1949 and became its first presidents.

## History during and after World War II

The last German Cardiac Society Congress during World War II was held in 1941, and preparations were underway for two further congresses in 1942 and 1943, but the Nazi leaders declared that scientific organizations could no longer hold meetings. In one respect, this interdiction made some sense, as most physicians were deployed in the war, and there was little time left to attend congresses. In addition, travelling in Germany—not only—to Bad Nauheim had become cumbersome and let's not forget the frequent air raids.

After WWII, the German Society for Circulation Research was dissolved by the military government, because all societies were considered to be Nazi organizations. But, in 1948, some members of the dissolved society met together in Karlsruhe, Germany and requested of the military government to recreate the society. Despite some difficulties, it was eventually decided that it was not a Nazi society, and it could be restored. The first congress of the re-founded society was held in 1949 again in Bad Nauheim. It featured with a 7-year delay the topics that the previously dissolved society had intended to cover at the congress in 1942.

## Cardiology becomes a specialty

In the beginnings of the society, scientists, researchers, and physiologists were the speakers within the society, while doctors in their private practices were ignored. This situation changed as cardiology increased in importance. Many young doctors were travelling to England, France, or the USA. In these countries they met with cardiologists and thus, developed an interest and acquired skills in cardiology. However, upon returning to Germany, they were still considered to be internal medicine specialists. In 1967, the first chair of a Department of Cardiology was created in West Germany, and only from then on did the terms 'cardiology' and 'cardiologists' became fixed expressions.



That first chair was held by Prof. Franz Loogen who headed the Department of Cardiology at the University of Düsseldorf. Only a few weeks later, two more chairs of cardiology were created: one in Munich and one in Bonn. As president of the German Cardiac Society from 1974 to 1975, Loogen became the first German President of the European Society of Cardiology in 1984.

After the birth of the new specialty, the professional coherence of the society was lost, as two parties opposed

each other in the mid-1970s: the strong and established researchers, scientists, physiologists, and pharmacologists on the one hand and the increasingly important clinicians on the other. In this critical situation, Loogen showed great vision that likely prevented the society from breaking up. He decided that for the scientists the annual meeting should continue to take place in Bad Nauheim. For the clinicians, a new meeting should be organized in the autumn of each year.

In consequence to this move, the society attracted more and more cardiologists from university cardiology departments, departments of cardiology in community hospitals, and private practices. As cardiology became an increasingly important specialty, the society's weight shifted from a scientific to a clinical orientation. Today, the society is still proud to welcome as members all physiologists and pharmacologists who work on heart or circulation research.



## Tailoring the society's name

The German Society for Circulation Research had changed its name in the 1950s to 'German Society for Heart and Circulation Research'. After having kept this name for more than 40 years, the cardiologists wanted it to more closely reflect their specialty. Hence, together with a new statute of 1995, the name was changed to *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kardiologie – Herz und Kreislaufforschung* translated literally as 'German Society of Cardiology - Heart and Circulation Research'. However, in the English version the new German name is not given as German Society of Cardiology but instead—as a tribute to the British Cardiac Society—as German Cardiac Society (GCS).

The cardiologists, however, were expecting that for practical reasons people would not use the full name after a while and simply speak about German Cardiac Society which almost became true. Nevertheless, it was then for the first time that the entire new statutes were translated into English, a necessary step because of the increasing international involvement.

## The society's more recent history

After WWII, Germany was understandingly isolated and neglected. In the course of time, the atmosphere changed and in 1950, the society joined the International Society and Federation of Cardiology, which today is the World Heart Federation, located in Paris, France. In 1952, the GCS joined the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) in London, England.

Since then, the ESC has organized five Congresses in Germany: 1984 in Düsseldorf, when Loogen was president of the ESC. In 1994 in Berlin in association with the World Congress of Cardiology, in Berlin again in 2002, and in Munich in both 2004 and 2008.

On the occasion of its 75th anniversary in 2002, the German Cardiac Society published both an article and a book with many more details about its history.<sup>1,2</sup> Other information is based on an interview and was published in 2011.<sup>3</sup>



German Cardiac Society Board, voting and non-voting members, May 2017. Standing left to right: Dr. Ali El-Armouche, Julia Gerszke (LL. M., in-house lawyer), Dr. Christian W. Hamm (Past-President), Dr. Albrecht Elsässer, Dr. Achim Schmalz, Dr. Konstantinos Papoutsis (CEO), Dr. Karin Rybak, Dr. Hugo A. Katus (President), Dr. Nikolaus Marx, Dr. Lars Siegfried Meier, Dr. Karl Werdan, Gudrun Krug (Executive Assistant) Sitting left to right: Dr. Norbert Frey, Dr. Andreas M. Zeiher (Incoming-President), Dr. Eckart Fleck, Dr. Steffen Massberg, Dr. Ralf P. Brandes, Dr. Hans Martin Hoffmeister.

## The society and the Nazi past

In 1933, all medical as well as other scientific societies were transformed according to the Nazi ideology. If the poignancy and speed of this process differed from one society to another, so did the ensnarement of a society's boards and members within the Nazi system. From careful distancing to active engagement as vicarious servants of racial hygiene, euthanasia, and barbarous experiments on human beings: all was possible or actually happened.

In the years following World War II, younger members started asking questions about the involvement of their predecessors in leading positions in the face of the Nazi system, and what their legacy might have been. But at that time many older members of the Society were still alive and in leading positions, and the younger members were too reserved to attack the older members and by doing so, damage the Society itself.

However, in 2012 the Board of the Society decided to shed light on this dark and felonious period. From the start it was clear that only an external, experienced historian would be able to comb the past from 1933 to 1945. After three and a half years, during the celebration of our 90th anniversary in 2017, the book 'Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Kreislaufforschung im Nationalsozialismus 1933–1945',<sup>4</sup> was presented and discussed in a special symposium in the presence of the then President of the Jewish Central Council.

In short, this intense historical investigation showed that many members of the relatively small Society were excluded according to Nazi doctrine—in most cases Jewish members. They fled to the UK and the USA. None of those few who returned to Germany after WWII re-joined the Society. Furthermore, the investigation showed that no violent crimes in the form of experiments on humans were committed by members of the society, either on prisoners in concentrations camps or on prisoners of war. Although many members were experienced scientists in circulatory regulation, thermoregulation, hyperoxia, and hypoxia—all topics of extreme military relevance—no evidence of barbarous acts could be found.

We are painfully aware that none of our members actively opposed the Nazi regime. Apparently, their academic career was more important, so remained silent. Only a few members publicly impugned the exclusion of members and experiments on humans.



Reception at Society in Düsseldorf with part of historic archives.



## The Society today

The Society's attractiveness is reflected by the dramatically increased number of members. In 1989 about 2000 members were counted, whereas in 2007—at the age of 80—the number had almost quadrupled to 7500 members. Today, 90 years since its founding, the Society has 10 388 members including cardiologists from universities, hospitals, and private practitioners are active in the Society, as well as many cardiac surgeons, paediatric cardiologists, and nurses.

In order to organize the Society's different tasks and goals a strong structure is laid down in the by-laws. The Society is run by the Board headed by the President. Representatives of cardiologists from universities, hospitals and private practice are elected by the general assembly, members from commissions and other societies are delegated.

The Executive Body of the Society is in the office at Düsseldorf, managed by the chief executive officer (CEO), with more than 40 employees. The office coordinates work of

- the Board of the Society,
- four Commissions,
- five Project Groups,
- thirty Working Groups,
- five Joint Ventures with other medical societies,
- two Sections,
- two Permanent Communities and
- an Academy for Continuous Education.

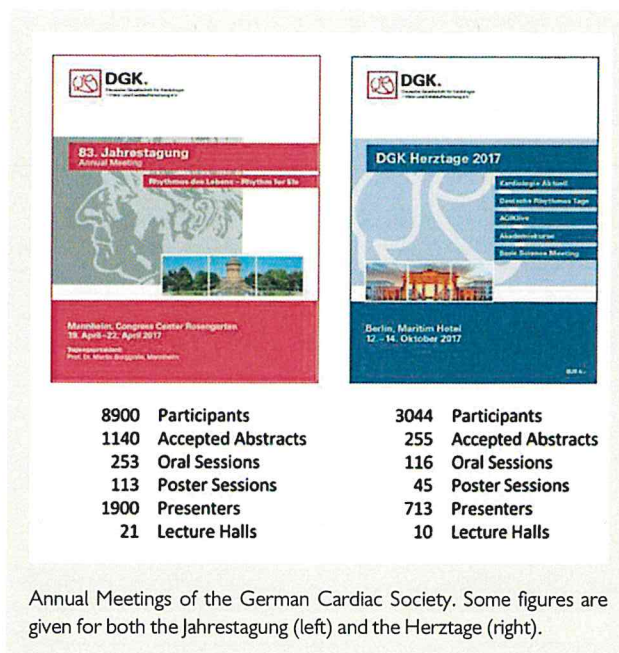
In total more than 470 members are active in leading honorary position of these commissions, groups, etc.

According to the society's by-laws one most important mission is to organize an annual congress. This 'spring meeting' was previously held in Bad Nauheim. In 1984 to accommodate more attendants, the Society moved to Mannheim. At its 90th anniversary in 2017, the spring meeting was attended by 8928 participants and more than 1920 lectures, abstracts, symposia, and posters were presented.

For several years, an additional annual autumn meeting was held at different locations. It covered mainly clinical topics and continuous education. Last year 'Herztage 2017' in Berlin, as the meeting is called, was attended by 3044 participants and 839 abstracts, symposia, and posters were discussed. In addition to the two main Congresses in 2016, the GCS offered 171 continuous educational courses, attended by 3791 doctors.

The society has a longstanding tradition of publishing journals which already began shortly after its foundation in 1927 with the 'Zeitschrift für Kreislaufforschung'. To meet the expanded requirements, three different journals are published today: 'Basic Research in Cardiology', 'Clinical Research in Cardiology' (CRIC), and 'Der Kardiologe'. Furthermore in 2016, the Society had already published 27 guidelines.

According to the by-laws another main topic is the supporting of young cardiologists to advance their careers. So, in 2016 the GCS spent 879 152 € for scholarships, grants, and awards, as well as



111 600 € were donated by private individuals and industry for grants and prizes.

Finally, the Society is proud to offer a Historical Archive in its Düsseldorf office, where objects, devices, and literature about the broad field of cardiology and circulation are presented.



## Acknowledgements

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**Conflict of interest:** none declared.