

doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehy427

The German Cardiac Society

A Contemporary Portrait of the largest European National Society

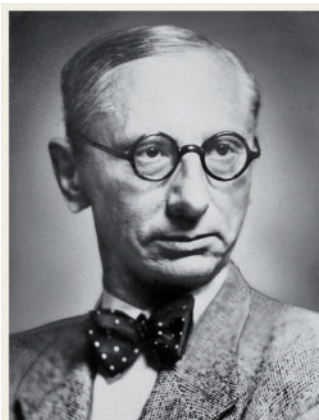
It was in June of 1927 during an educational course in Bad Nauheim, when Prof.s Bruno Kisch and Arthur Weber decided to create the German Society for Circulation Research 'to advance circulation research in Germany'.

Founded in 1924 in New York, the American Heart Association is the oldest cardiac society, which has kept its founding name. However, 2 years earlier in 1922 the Cardiac Club was formed in England, which much later became the present British Cardiovascular Society. The German Cardiac Society is the third cardiology society established in the world.

At the World Congress of Cardiology in 1950 in Paris, the German Cardiac Society

(GCS) became a member of the International Society and Federation of Cardiology (ISFC), and at the European Congress of Cardiology in 1952 in London the GCS also became a member of European Society of Cardiology (ESC).

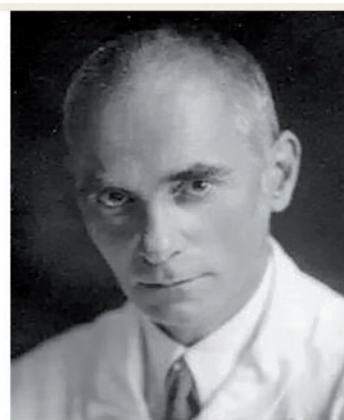
The aim of the GCS is promotion of science in cardiovascular diseases, organization of congresses and meetings, and of training, training courses, and continuing education for its members.



Eberhard Koch



Bruno Kisch



Arthur Weber

The Secretary Generals

During the entire 91 years of its existence, the secretary generals of the GCS have played a key role. Prof. Bruno Kisch was the first secretary general and successfully held together the few 30–50 members in the early years. After Prof. Kisch fled from the Nazi regime to the United States in 1938, Prof. Eberhard Koch became the secretary general until the end of World War II.

When the society was refounded after the war, Prof. Hans Schäfer—a famous epidemiologist and physiologist from Heidelberg—became Koch's successor.

From 1953 to 1976 Prof. Rudolf Thauer, a physiologist in Bad Nauheim/Giessen, filled the position of the Society's secretary general. In the years 1976–89, he was followed by Prof. Wolfgang Schaper, another physiologist in Bad Nauheim/Giessen.

With Prof. Gunther Arnold—also a physiologist—the office moved to Düsseldorf, where he managed the Society from 1989 to 2007.

Dr Kostas Papoutsis, a mathematician, who has his doctorate in health sciences, became secretary general in 2007, and holds this role today. Thus, the Society has only had seven secretary generals during the 91 years of its existence, and they were responsible for continuous growth of the society, for members and missions.

Further historical details are found in both the literature^{1–3} and a book published at the 75th Anniversary of the Society.⁴



Hans Schäfer

Rudolf Thauer

Wolfgang Schaper

Gunther Arnold

Kostas Papoutsis



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 German Cardiac Society Today

The Society is located in Düsseldorf and has a branch in Berlin. In parallel with the increasing number of members and missions, the staff grew to its current size of some 40 members. Among other activities, they work for the Board of the Society, 4 Commissions, 5 Project Groups, 30 Working Groups, and the Academy for Continuous Education.



In 2012, the Board unanimously voted to investigate the Society’s Nazi past. The result of an intensive historical investigation showed that no violent crimes in the form of experiments on humans had been committed by members of the society, either on prisoners in concentrations camps or on prisoners-of-war.⁵

Members

During the term of the two last secretary generals, the GCS grew steadily and now has somewhat more than 10 000 members, making the GCS the largest European Cardiac Society.

There are quite a few elements that contribute to the society’s attractiveness. First of all the member mix should be mentioned, which consists of clinicians and scientists from areas with relation to the heart.

For example, almost all important cardiac surgeons are members as are paediatric cardiologists, and consequently presidents of the GCS have also appointed from these specialties. Many specialists from Austria and Switzerland become members, as they share the same language. And certainly, the society is open to a wide spectrum of interested parties such as Professors, clinicians in private practice, scientists and nurses.

Scientific Meetings

The first Meeting took place as early as 1928. In the course of time, the Annual (Spring) Meetings in Mannheim grew in both the number of participants and the number of scientific presentations. A large number of the presentations are based on the abstracts that cover numerous fields such as cardiology, pharmacology, physiology, clinical research, rehabilitation, cardiac research, and paediatric cardiology.

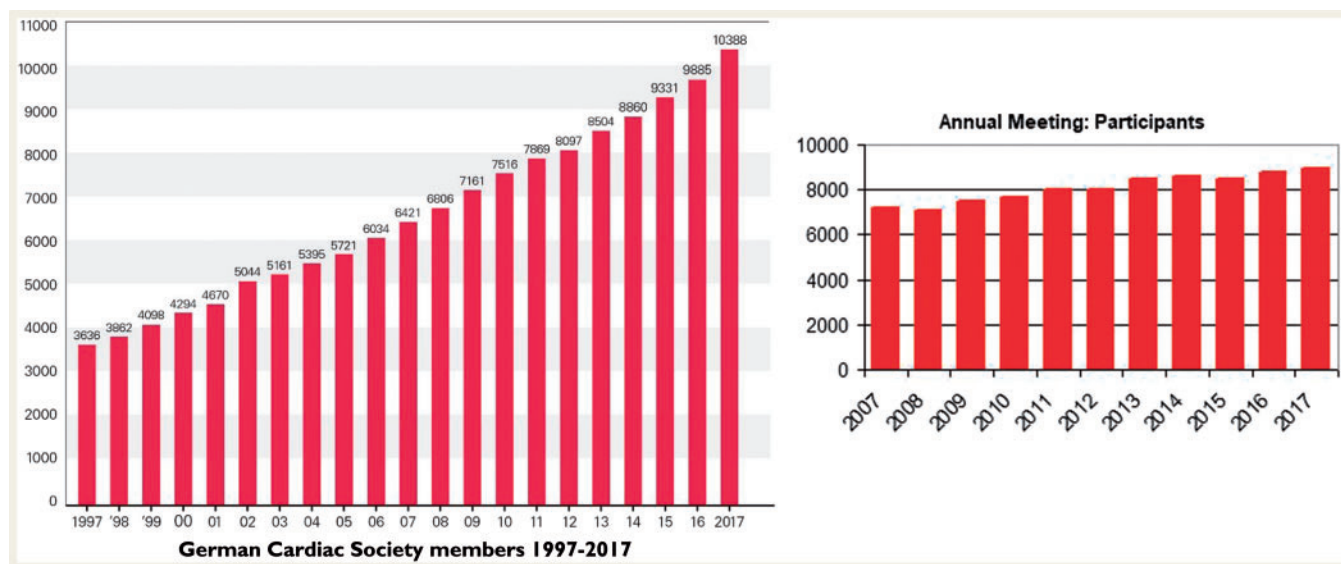
In 2017, 1050 abstracts were accepted after grading and were later presented either in 250 oral sessions or in 110 poster sessions by almost 1900 presenters. Apparently, this meeting becomes more and more attractive also for foreigners, as 5% of the 8900 participants came from abroad, mostly from Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States.

Apart from its size, other peculiarities contribute to the Meeting’s diversity. To give but two examples: (i) The regular programme is also shaped through contributions from other scientific societies, e.g. there are sessions on Diabetes and the Heart, the Brain and the Heart, the Kidneys and the Heart. (ii) A changing European guest nation appears each year, enriching the program by country-specific topics.

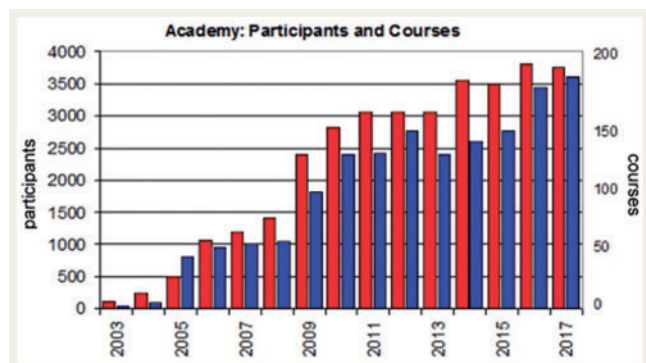
The traditional Autumn Meeting has somewhat changed its character and has become ‘Herztage’ (Heart Day) now regularly hosted in Berlin. While the spring meeting has a strictly scientific character, the Herztage concentrate on high-level education. As an expression of the acceptance of this concept, 3000 participants attended 116 oral sessions and 45 poster sessions from more than 700 presenters at the 2017 Meeting.

In addition to the two principal meetings, special sub-congresses are run by individual members or working groups and associations of the society.

In 2001, the Academy ‘Kardiologie’ was founded in order to provide a high level continuous educational programme for society members. Workshops, seminars, courses are organized, also in co-operation with the related industry during the Spring and the Fall meeting but



also as special events arranged by the society's office or official organisers. It should be pointed out that all events are approved by official medical authorities.



Publications

Like other cardiac societies, the GCS has a longstanding tradition in publishing journals that had started already shortly after the foundation in 1927. At that time, the 'Zeitschrift für Kreislaufforschung' was edited by Profs. Stadler and Kisch. To meet the wide range of different requirements, five well reputed journals are published today: 'Basic Research in Cardiology', 'Clinical Research in Cardiology (CRIC)', 'Der Kardiologe', 'Herzschrittmacher + Elektrophysiologie', and 'Cardio News'.

GCS and Health System

It is obvious that the GCS drafts and publishes press releases. Like other medical scientific societies, the GCS develops and publishes guidelines and regularly edits them. Currently, 29 guidelines are published.

The society is proud to be the recognized and competent dialogue partner for decision makers such as politicians, health insurances, and funding associations.

Prizes and scholarships

In accordance with the by-laws, the GCS awards numerous prizes and scholarships to a total value of almost 900 000 Euros. An additional 110 000 Euros were donated in 2017 for prizes and scholarships from private persons and companies.

The GCS does much to support and motivate young scientists. During the Annual Meeting special presentations for young investigators are held by senior researchers that cover from 'How to write an application' to 'Which statistics should I use?'

On the other hand, a large proportion of the money mentioned above is utilized to support young scientists by advancing their career

through research and travel grants. Finally, an individual section 'Young GCS' exists with the main objective to support both the scientific and clinical exchange and the formation of national and international networks.

GCS and its history

Inevitably, the future will become the past and with that foresight, a project group 'History of Cardiology' has been created. This 'Historical Archive' group performs large-scale activities. One of the major activities is collecting and presenting cardiology-related literature and devices in the Düsseldorf office. Some interesting books and historical devices are annually exhibited at the Mannheim Meeting, where individual presentations are given. Details on the book inventory, the device collection, as well as texts about pioneering cardiologists can be found at the society's homepage (<https://historischesarchiv.dgk.org/>). Further developing the Historical Archive, increasing its visibility to the public, updating the homepage, and, convincing young cardiologists of the former values of their specialty are the pleasure of Dr de Haan, the present head of this special institution.

Acknowledgements

We much appreciate the support of Prof. S. Cleveland for his reading of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest: none declared.

References

References are available as [supplementary material](#) at *European Heart Journal* online.