

Professor Paul Van Schil: close interaction, discussion and cooperation with younger and older colleagues make our profession beautiful and worthwhile

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The 28th annual meeting of European Association for Cardio-thoracic Surgery (EACTS) came to a successful conclusion on October 15, 2014. This time, *Translational Lung Cancer Research (TLCR)* has the pleasure to invite Prof. Paul Van Schil (*Figure 1*), the President of the EACTS 2014, for a small talk about his experience and impression on this year's EACTS annual meeting.

Prof. Paul Van Schil graduated from medical school with great honour in 1982 at the University of Antwerp. After completing his training in general surgery he became a fellow in the department of cardiothoracic surgery at the Antonius Hospital, Nieuwegein, The Netherlands. His doctoral thesis was entitled "*Bronchial sleeve resection for lung cancer: long-term results*". In 1990 he became a staff member at the department of surgery of the Antwerp University Hospital in Belgium. Currently, he is professor in thoracic and vascular surgery at the Faculty of Medicine and chair of the department of thoracic and vascular surgery of the University Hospital of Antwerp. His main interests are thoracic and vascular surgery with a special emphasis on lung cancer staging and therapy, lung metastases and mesothelioma. Prof. Paul Van Schil was the President of the EACTS 2014.

TLCR: What were the highlights for this year's EACTS annual meeting?

Prof. Van Schil: This year's annual meeting of EACTS was highly successful and attracted more than 5,000 participants making this the largest cardiothoracic surgical conference in the world. Also the quality was excellent. Our four domains within EACTS, the acquired cardiac domain, congenital cardiac domain, vascular and thoracic domains worked very hard to create an outstanding programme. The overall structure of our meeting has proven to be quite successful and did not undergo major changes. The main highlights were the techno-college, postgraduate course, oral abstract



Figure 1 Professor Paul Van Schil.

sessions which were highly selected due to the high number of submitted abstracts, and the wet labs at the end of the conference which attracted a lot of junior surgeons. New this year were the so-called "rapid fire sessions" with short presentations followed by stimulating discussions. The honored guest lecture by Bart Loeys from our university on "Genetics of aortic disease" and my presidential address focusing on the versatile beauty of the hand got a lot of positive comments. During the last lecture Jan Gielis, our research fellow, had the opportunity to present his ideas on research performed by young surgeons in training. His impressions were found to be very thoughtful.

TLCR: What are the attractions in the thoracic domain in this year's meeting? Is there any controversial topics placed on the table?

Prof. Van Schil: One of the main attractions in the thoracic domain was the techno-college with life surgery from Istanbul, where Dr. Mustafa Yuksel was the local organizer. He and his team provided excellent demonstrations

on chest wall surgery including pectus deformities and thoracic wall tumors. At the postgraduate course, we tried to stimulate active participation on staging of lung cancer, oligometastatic disease focusing on current management, and intraoperative complications.

One of the most controversial topics is related to surgery for mesothelioma on which a nice update was presented highlighting the current role of pleurectomy/decortication and extrapleural pneumonectomy. Very attractive was the session on nightmares in cardiothoracic surgery where a parallel room had to be opened to accommodate all participants.

TLCR: *As the president, we understand you must be busy with preparation for the whole meeting. Would you like to share with us anything that impressed you most during such period?*

Prof. Van Schil: Indeed it was a very busy year, but also very stimulating and rewarding. There was an excellent collaboration between our different domains and I was really impressed by the dedicated staff in the Windsor Office working at very high pressure over the last months to get the programme completed just before the start of the meeting. Also our reviewers did a very nice job in ranking of the submitted abstracts and our editorial office has to be congratulated for collecting the papers of the accepted oral presentations and invite the discussants. It is very stimulating for our young researchers that these manuscripts will be published in the *European Journal of Cardiothoracic Surgery* or our second journal, *Interactive Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery*. Nicely documented, specific techniques with video-presentations can be submitted to our third publication, the *Multimedia Manual of Cardiothoracic Surgery (MMCTS)*.

TLCR: *You have built quite a career, your research, your profession, and your mentorship etc. How do you combine all this? Where did you get your energy?*

Prof. Van Schil: Building a scientific career is a very slow process. When I was a student and resident I had the privilege to work with outstanding surgeons putting emphasis not only on technical skills, but also on continuous improvement of existing surgical techniques, multimodality therapy, asking the right questions in research, and being involved in teaching at a graduate and postgraduate level. Our university hospital was brand new when I was a student and I had a strong admiration for the initial professors who had to create a completely new department in a very short

time period and start teaching at the medical school of the university as well. Although at that time I was at the lowest level, I always have been proud to be part of that process. At the present time we try to keep the level high which is not always that easy to accomplish but being surrounded by dedicated colleagues and experienced staff, not only at the local level but also at international organizations including EACTS, greatly facilitates this process by making it a real cooperative effort. This provides the necessary energy to continue every year, trying to make our annual meeting even more attractive.

TLCR: *Is there anything you want to say to the young surgeons and the potential participants for the upcoming meeting?*

Prof. Van Schil: As indicated in my presidential address, patient care is our core business and in fact, education and research are closely related to this. By keeping high standards in patient care and participating in basic or clinical research by trying to answer relevant scientific questions, you stay on the edge of new knowledge. You are able to explore new techniques and new accomplishments in your field and this makes our profession more fascinating every day.

When you have performed some good researches, try to send in abstract for our annual meeting and hopefully, it will be accepted. Try to actively participate at the annual congress for which you get nice opportunities. I would also like to invite you to join our social programme allowing you to interact with colleagues and make new friends, which you will certainly enjoy. Close interaction, discussion and cooperation with younger and older colleagues certainly make our profession so beautiful and worthwhile!

TLCR: *Thank you very much for your time!*

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