

From John F. Martin



The Working Group on Thrombosis has always been a source not only of good science and friendship, but also of life experiences. I recall a meeting in Florence which could only be accessed through British Airways via Pisa. We had taken the train from Florence to Pisa and had time to spare before the plane left, so a group of thrombosis experts decided to have a look at the Leaning Tower. We calculated that we only needed an hour to get from Pisa to the airport before our plane left. However, when the time came to leave we couldn't find a taxi anywhere. It was lunch time and the whole of Pisa was deserted. We first became a little worried and then as we toured the streets we realised that we might be in great difficulty. Eventually, we were running from street to street looking for a taxi. Everyone assured us that this was an impossibility at lunchtime. Eventually, with little time to spare, we came across an elegant carriage drawn by a horse which was used to take tourists around Pisa at a very slow pace. We explained our predicament to the driver, who said he would do his best to get us to the airport depending on what fee was negotiated. This was done rapidly since we only had half an hour to go before our plane left. We jumped in the carriage and off we went at a gallop, leaving the town and heading towards the airport. We arrived 15 minutes before the plane left, the horse covered in lather. We jumped from the carriage with our bags to the amazement of other passengers and officials. However, never let it be said that anybody in the Thrombosis Working Group ever missed a plane, which of course we got with minutes to spare.

A more dramatic memory is from a meeting in Stockholm when I was sharing a hotel with Carlo Patrono, a venerable and very ancient member of the Working Group. As you will know, Carlo is one of the world's experts on aspirin and has written extensively on the dosage. At that time I suffered occasionally from paroxysmal atrial fibrillation and was very distressed to find myself going into atrial fibrillation following two cold beers and having run up five flights of stairs in the hotel. I immediately went to my room and phoned Carlo for help. A couple of moments later, he came to my room. I explained the situation and my history that this had happened occasionally before and that it had happened now, how I was very concerned about getting some treatment in Stockholm and that I had taken 600 mgs of aspirin while waiting for him. In his cool, calm patrician manner his only comment was, "too much".

Carlo organised a taxi to take me to the Karolinska Hospital for a DC electroconversion. Once we found the casualty department we were not allowed in unless we paid a fee. I had no money in my pocket and they wouldn't take my credit card. However, Carlo saved the day by lending me a large amount of Swedish kronor. I think that I have never paid him back. He actually stayed with me for a while as a series of doctors came in to look at me before telephoning higher command. A very attractive young female endocrinologist said that she was the appropriate doctor on duty and she had spoken to the chief of cardiology about what should be done. She put up an intravenous infusion of Sotalol. After a while this made me very disinhibited and I began telling Carlo about details of my life and apparently I ended with an in-depth appreciation of my feelings for the endocrinologist. However, the story ended well, I had a DC conversion in the morning (200 joules) and was able to give my talk at the meeting at 2 pm that afternoon.

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