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## Editorial

# BSPU live, challenging the crisis



The world has changed, 2020 will forever be remembered as the COVID-19 year. When the year started, we had amazing opportunities looking forward to exchange experiences in Pediatric Urology. Everyone was excited about the AUA, the EPU, and we, in Latin America, the SIUP meeting which was to be held in Ecuador. In addition, who reading this letter was not excited with the joint meeting in Lisbon? The Brazilian School of Pediatric Urology (BSPU), a joint group of urologists and pediatric surgeons in Brazil with more than 200 members, was prepared to be part of the joint EPU meeting in Portugal as supporting members, as Portugal is our mother country., Unfortunately, our world fell apart in March when the Health World Organization announced the pandemic status, from 1 min to another our small and globalized world past.

Hopefully, this year will also be remembered as the year where many things in our “common world” have changed. One of these are scientific meetings. From sometime, the medical meetings were under the microscope looking for a new and better way to disseminate information efficiently. We could recall the brainstorm about the current meetings in the last JPU editorial by Mr Ransley, nostalgic for the meetings of the past, arguing in favor of more discussion and, as well, the comments by Wood, Hoebeker, Nelson and Cooper [1–3].

Now, more than ever, we could quote Winston Churchill “*A crisis is a terrible thing to waste*” as reminded by Professor Anthony Caldamone in his presentation on BSPU LIVE. With that in mind and the idea to connect people virtually disseminating the knowledge, we challenged the world with 15 h of continuous debate on Pediatric Urology. The main goal was to connect as many people as possible over the course of one day, “following the sun” from the outback of the Aussie landscape to the Los Andes mountains in South America.

The meeting started to be advertised by social media just 7 days before. Saturday 13th of June was the D day. The total Congress happened in a continuous streaming address for the audience, in parallel each round table speakers group joined together 30 min before

in a separate virtual room to test the systems, “breaking the ice” and interacting socially as any live congress. The challenge was not easy; would the field experts like to connect? Would people stay connected for such a long period? How could we promote debate and discussion by an online platform? How could we guarantee that the system would not fail, and so on? As every big dream, a great team was created; pediatric urologists from all over Brazil, close friends from Argentina, Chile and Spain sat together to make this happen. We contacted with the Brazilian Society of Urology, Brazilian Society of Pediatric Surgery and the Iberoamerican Pediatric Urology Society to support us. In a short period of 2 months we invited more than 50 experts from all over the world. None declined the invitation and the program was built with the speakers’ suggestions, where everyone was invited to speak on his or her topic of preference. Almost all the panellists knew the organizers, having had some relationship with at least one. In the end, this helped in developing trust and credibility.

After 10 totally live round tables, and over 50 world recognized experts, most of the Pediatric Urology topics were addressed without delay, on scheduled times and keeping the essential debate period in every single panel as advocated by Ransley.

In total there were over 3000 people connected throughout the day from more than 75 countries, from all the continents, with an average attendance per session of more than 400. This was totally free of charge.

Looking at just the cold numbers it was remarkably successful, probably one of the largest meetings in the history of pediatric urology. However, are numbers the final measure of success? Of course, they matter, as do the technical issues. Incidentally, there was uninterrupted streaming for the entire Congress, which could have been a complete disaster. However, we would like to highlight other learned experiences.

The main idea of any meeting was to discuss knowledge, to learn from each other, to challenge new ideas, procedures, to share different solutions for our common problems,

to improve the quality of life of our children, improve their health, and to interact in a friendly environment.

The BSPU Live event tried to provide that. One important issue in this achievement was the hard work made by each session chairman, as suggested by Wood [2], who tried to keep the discussions at a high scientific level while keeping an collegial environment between speakers and audience throughout the web chat. This was a completely new dynamic that we needed to learn; how to discuss by online chat in a live session in so many different time zones. Surprisingly, there were more people asking and interacting by chat, than queuing the microphone in prior meetings. Perhaps this was because people from any background, any place in the world, any language felt more comfortable behind a screen than in front of an 800 attendance auditorium, avoiding the senior-junior “bullying” claimed by Cooper and Nelson [3]. The online connection by chat or even by twitter, increased the network relationship for many of the attendees. We might insinuate that as it happened with the questions and discussion, this kind of interaction may have helped many to contact others, which in other ways it may have been more difficult. There is another paradox of this kind of meeting, that is bringing together at the same table in a democratic environment and with direct connections experts and novices alike.

But some personal connections are not perfect in a virtual environment. Conventional meetings have its part of celebration, casual chat, socialization, and networking, all of which are very important in developing professional relationships. This is not simple to re-create online, and maybe this is what we miss the most now. In this way, we identified another irony: the online meeting with 50 experts was only possible due to the connections we made with the speakers in the last 10 years of face-to-face meetings.

Last but not least, every meeting needs financing. Meeting costs are skyrocketing every year and many organizations are struggling to keep the show running. The audience must cope with high registration costs, limiting the number of events to be attended. In the last years, with less support from industry, the meetings have changed their format to include more abstracts and sessions, to increase the number of paying participants, helping to reduce the financial burden for the infrastructure that is needed [1,3].

The cost of the BSPU Live Event was remarkably reasonable: 3000 USD which was paid by a single sponsor after a quick and easy financial negotiation. This translates to a per minute meeting cost of around 3 USD, and the cost by attendees of 1.0 USD. This made it possible for this event to be free for everyone. In addition, there was no travel costs, minimal or no lost time from productive clinical work, no cost for a convention center, transportation, food and beverage, marketing, accommodations, etc.

At this point a sincere message of gratitude must be sent to all panellists that donated the best of their knowledge and time.

Is this format the new normal? We really do not have this answer. We do believe that BSPU Live *democratized* the information, the access to it, and demonstrated the possibility to bring the “big guys” together, and the opportunity to get in contact with more and different people. To sum up BSPU Live delivered education to any individual with an internet connection. Nevertheless, the bar is settled; the

format has been proved, and others like SPU meeting 2 weeks later successfully took a similar pathway. Maybe, COVID-19 crisis is not “a waste” after all, maybe we are facing a change in scientific meetings where the abstract presentations, panels, round tables, could be done live and online, with the same high scientific mission before we would see, talk and share living moments together among us again.

We need to remain flexible and think creatively. We should not accept nor expect a return to the “way it used to be”.

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## Conflict of interest

None.

## References

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