



## ORAHS Newsletter Autumn 2010

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### **1. All change in ORAHS – by Sally Brailsford and Roberto Aringhieri**

After ten years as Chairman of ORAHS, in the summer of 2010 Jan Vissers has decided to take a well-earned “retirement” from the role and the ORAHS Board decided that he would hand over the reins to me. My first comment was, I’m not doing ten years, you only get 8 years for armed robbery! I was also reminded of my father’s speech at my wedding, in which he said that the first 25 years are the worst. So I shall do it for five years max, and then hand over to someone else. Jan will be a very tough act to follow and his achievements as Chairman are evident to all. In his period of office, ORAHS meetings have grown from around 30-40 attendees to well over 100 in the last 2 or 3 years, and membership has increased in proportion, so that ORAHS is now undisputedly one of the world’s leading groups of healthcare operational researchers. Despite this, the meetings have all successfully retained their “family” feeling, and this will be one of my two guiding principles for the future. My other hobby-horse is getting OR models implemented and making a real difference in practice, not just publishing clever papers in academic journals. This is something where ORAHS has a proud tradition and it’s why I chose to work in the field in the first place.



As a result of becoming Chairman, I had to give up the role of secretary/web manager, and this job has been taken over by Roberto Aringhieri from the University of Torino in Italy. I thought it would be good to start by briefly introducing ourselves. I started out - many years ago - with a maths degree but had no idea what to do with it. So I decided to use my talent for languages and worked for a number of years as a freelance translator (of Russian mathematical papers). However, I was never able to get enough work to make a living, and so, having worked in hospitals as a student vacation job, I decided to train as a nurse. I took some time out to have a family (Rachel, David and Anthony, now aged 31, 29 and 27) and then, in the late 80’s, I had a bit of a “road to Damascus moment” when I discovered Operational Research. I decided to return to university and do an MSc in it. I discovered two things: a) doing a full-time MSc with three children under the age of 8 really improves your time management skills, and b) you could combine an academic interest in mathematics with a practical interest in healthcare! My MSc dissertation, on HIV/AIDS, somehow turned into a PhD and I became an academic. It was never a conscious career decision, but it turned out to be a perfect choice for me – and I think I am amazingly privileged to be able to work in such an endlessly fascinating, challenging and important field. One of my career highlights was undoubtedly the 2005 ORAHS conference and EURO Summer Institute we held in Southampton.

My friends will know that I have two main interests outside work – music and sport. I sing (as those who have been on ORAHS coach trips will testify, although I normally prefer more conventional choral singing) and I'm a season-ticket holder at Southampton Football Club. My husband Chris and I regularly attend major sporting events for our holidays, and we have been twice to the Olympics, in Athens (2004) and Beijing (2008). Needless to say, we are looking forward keenly to London 2012!



**Roberto Aringhieri – Secretary and Website Manager** A friend of mine usually refers to me as a “gipsy researcher” since I used to move a lot (see here) also changing research subject: energy planning in Pisa, telecommunication network in Reggio Emilia, healthcare in Milano.

I met the ORAHS community in 2007 in Saint-Etienne when I started boring all of you talking about our work on EMS concerning the management of ambulance fleet and human health resources. With Elena Tanfani and Angela Testi, I'm involved on a 3-year project on clinical pathways funded by the Italian Ministry of University. Now, I live in Turin, the city of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games and, especially, the city of Juventus football club, the best football team ever! From March 2010, I don't have any free time for biking, cooking or reading books and comics since I'm looking after my first son Pietro, to whom I'm passing on my love for the sea.

Finally, I'd like to share the words, and the feelings, I sent to Jan Vissers in July: “So the answer is yes - I'm available for the post - even if I'm a little bit scared I won't meet the ORAHS community expectations. But, I will do my best.”

## **2. Genova 2010 – by Angela Testi**

The theme chosen for the 36th ORAHS Conference held in Genova (Italy) from 18th to 23rd July 2010 was OR for patient-centered health care delivery. It is the challenge faced by every Health System today. This means asking how can we move from a resource focused healthcare system to a service oriented system in spite of the limitations on resources on the macro level due to cost reduction. 137 participants from 23 countries came to Genova and 115 presentations were offered. The Conference was organized and performed as the “research family” experience that usually characterizes the ORAHS group.

The program was scheduled in such a way to plan a “together activity” each day. In particular, three plenary scientific activities focused on current strategic problems took place on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.



On Monday, the conference opened with a plenary session that gave us some insights about the US Healthcare Reform. On Tuesday, the traditional hospital tour was carried out at Gaslini Children's Hospital, where the “patient centered perspective”, is particularly focused on. Interaction with health care was achieved organizing in the same hospital soon afterwards the Symposium “Modelling the Delivery of Care for Younger People”, as a way of exchanging and sharing opinions and experiences. The photo shows the “Aula Magna” at the Gaslini Children's Hospital.

On Wednesday a second Symposium about “Modelling the Care of Older People” took place, organized by Duncan Boldy, in the name of the past presidents, all four of whom attended the meeting. They were particularly appreciated not only for their scientific activities but also for their performance as singers, as you can see in the photo, during the Gala Dinner on Thursday.



*The four past presidents singing at Villa Zerbino: from left to right, Mårten Lagergren, Duncan Boldy, Jan Vissers and David Clayden.*

Most of the joint activities were social ones, in keeping with the ORAHS tradition. The social program was planned to introduce the participants to Genova, a very ancient and rich town, and to give the possibility of discovering something about the nice Liguria region. In particular, we remember the first tour on Sunday around the port, the “caruggi tour” to reach Palazzo Tursi for the town city greetings, the blue sea of Portofino and San Fruttuoso and the villa Zerbino for the conference dinner.



*Town hall (palazzo Tursi)*



*After swimming in San Fruttuoso*



*ORAHS participants and accompanying persons, Villa Zerbino*

We hope that as Jan Vissers said during the opening meeting the Genova conference can be summarized by the formula: “Perspective & Content & Fun”. As you can see we are already travelling to meet everybody in Cardiff next July!!!



Finally, we remind you that two post conference publication opportunities are currently open to all researchers, not only attendees of the conference:

- 1) **“Computers & Operations Research”** special issue titled "OR for health care delivery" Submission Deadline: 20th December 2010. Decision of acceptance and approximate publication: June 2011.
- 2) Collective International Springer Volume titled **“Advanced decision making methods applied to health care”**. Submission Deadline: 28th February 2011. Approximate decision of acceptance May 2011. Approximate publication: November/December 2011.

The call for papers and complete authors guidelines can be found at the following link:  
<http://www.diem.unige.it/orahs2010/postconference.php>

### **3. ORAHS 2011, Cardiff - by Paul Harper**

#### **“OR Informing National Health Policy”**



Preparations for the 2011 meeting are well under way. The organising committee (Paul Harper, Janet Williams, Vince Knight and Israel Vieira) are looking forward to welcoming our ORAHS friends to Cardiff, for what we trust will be an excellent scientific meeting coupled with an enjoyable and varied social programme. This will be the first occasion that the meeting has taken place in Wales, and we hope you will take the opportunity to visit and explore our country (population of only 3 million people but some 11million sheep!), which is

steeped in history (mostly fighting battles against the invading English) and has some very beautiful countryside, national parks and coastline.

The theme of the conference is “OR informing national health policy” and has been chosen to reflect that as a community we could do better in influencing and informing national debate and policy, rather than a tendency (although as still necessary and valuable as it is) to work at a local level of decision making. In-keeping with this theme, we are delighted to announce that Edwina Hart, the Health Minister for Health and Social Services in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government), has accepted our invitation to open the conference. Keynotes will then be given by Prof. Sir Mansel Aylward, Chair, Public Health Wales, and Prof. Terry Young, Professor of Healthcare Systems, Brunel University. The reception on the Monday evening is being sponsored by Lord Dafydd Elis-Thomas (Member of the Welsh Assembly Government) and will take place in the impressive assembly building (Senedd) overlooking Cardiff Bay.

New for ORAHS 2011, we are introducing a poster session for early career researchers (within 10 years of starting within OR). This is in response to feedback from previous meetings over concerns of the growing numbers of papers (and therefore a need for less time per paper and/or more parallel streams), so we do hope that many will take the opportunity to present a poster rather than a paper, especially as we have obtained sponsorship for a £500 prize for the best poster!

Finally, for the social programme we are planning guided tours of Cardiff Castle and the Millennium Stadium, and a trip to the Brecon Beacons National Park. The conference banquet will take place in the impressive surroundings of the National Museum of Wales.

The ORAHS 2011 website will go live early in the new year. There is a very good range of hotels and accommodation to suit all budgets in Cardiff, and the University is conveniently based in the city centre itself. Cardiff has its own international airport as well as fast train links to London (journey time of 2 hours) and to Bristol (for Bristol international airport).

*Scenes from in and around Cardiff - from top left (clockwise): Cardiff University and National Museum of Wales; Cardiff Bay; Brecon Beacons National Park; Millennium Stadium.*



#### **4. PhD student perspective – by Maria Guzman Castillo, University of Southampton**



It was back in 2002 when I took my first course on Operational Research (OR) as part of my bachelor degree in Industrial Engineering back home in Mexico City. Since then, I knew I wanted to do OR for the rest of my life. For me it was “love at first sight” from the very beginning. After one year working as production planner at Unilever Mexico, I started looking for master programmes abroad; the programme at University of Southampton caught my attention because of its emphasis on OR for Healthcare. I enjoyed every single day of my MSc, which convinced me more and more that OR was the right profession for me. However the idea of a PhD didn’t come immediately, it was after six months back in Mexico working for the statistics department at my former university that I decided to leave everything again in Mexico and come back to Southampton for the PhD.

During the admission process when I was asked about my research area, it was clear I wanted to do healthcare for Mexico. I come from a family of physicians and I grew up listening to my father and mother discussing and complaining about the health and healthcare in Mexico. Therefore the idea of working three years on trying to bring solutions for a specific problem, which contributes at least in a very small scale to improve the quality of the healthcare systems, seemed to me fascinating. Now I am in the beginning of my third year. My research aims to address one of the main issues in the Mexican national healthcare system in terms of patient length of stay. It is argued that the average length of stay for some surgical procedures or diagnosis varies considerably across different healthcare providers. More complex and sophisticated tools to understand length of stay are needed to help decision makers to develop a common national action plan to improve quality and efficiency of services. But it is not only at the national level where more complex tools are needed; managers and medical staff at local hospitals are interested on the internal factors which affect the length of stay of individuals at hospitals e.g. characteristics of patients: age, sex, diagnosis, the presence of co-morbidities, pathological history, pathological family history, etc. The aim of my research is therefore to develop a statistical model of the length of stay which captures the true variability of the system and incorporates characteristics, attributes, and other internal and external factors related to the patient and the length of stay, at both, national and local level.

When I am not working on my PhD, I enjoy spending my leisure time reading historical novels, cooking (and eating what I cook), taking pictures, and hiking. Coming from one of the biggest cities in the world make me appreciate the outdoors facilities that Southampton and surroundings can offer.

My first ORAHS conference was in Leuven 2009, I was impressed by the friendly and relaxed environment of the conference. I couldn't believe that some of the authors of the papers that I was reading for my literature review were there, always keen to speak to you and discuss some aspects of your research. During ORAHS Italy 2010, I had the opportunity to make my first international presentation. I felt very confident delivering the presentation and I received very good questions, positive and constructive feedback. Again I was impressed by the warmth and simplicity of those people with long careers in OR who approached me to give advice, ask further questions or discuss aspects of my research. You feel in an environment where there are no hierarchies or positions; after all, all of us are colleagues, and all of us are creating solutions for the existing problems. One of the best things of ORAHS is the perfect balance between the academic and the social side. Every day after a productive academic session we had a rich social programme; not forgetting the jumps made from a cliff to splash in the warm Mediterranean Sea in San Fruttuoso. I am really looking forward to ORAHS 2011.

## **5. Calls for Papers and conference announcements**

### **INFORMS Healthcare 2011, June 20-22, Montreal, Canada**

A new INFORMS thematic conference on the health sector that brings together researchers and stakeholders to elaborate on current challenges. INFORMS is pleased to introduce a new, dynamic and highly-focused brand of conference. INFORMS Healthcare 2011 will combine the deep research focus of a traditional INFORMS meeting with an emphasis on real-world application that distinguishes the INFORMS conference. Key networking elements will put an emphasis on

collaboration and bring researchers and stakeholders together to elaborate on the most current challenges in the health sector. ORAHS members interested in contributing a (interactive / poster) presentation or organizing a session may contact cluster chair Erwin Hans ([e.w.hans@utwente.nl](mailto:e.w.hans@utwente.nl)). Conference website: <http://meetings2.informs.org/Conf/healthcare2011/index.html>

### IFORS 2011, 10-15 July, Melbourne, Australia

The 19th Triennial Conference of the International Federation of Operational Research Societies (<http://www.ifors2011.org/>) is taking place in Melbourne. Leonid Churilov is organizing the "Health Care Applications" stream for the conference and looks forward to another interesting and vibrant occasion to talk and learn about contributions of OR to health and medical care. Please contact Leonid ([leonid.churilov@gmail.com](mailto:leonid.churilov@gmail.com)) if you are interested in presenting a paper or organising a session. The deadline is December 10.

### Special Issue of *Manufacturing & Service Operations Management* on "Applications of Healthcare Operations Management" (Erwin Hans is one of the associate editors of this Special Issue)

The goal of this special issue is to highlight and consolidate the contributions that operations management methodologies can provide for the healthcare sector. We seek to publish high-quality, original manuscripts that rigorously apply cutting-edge ideas to novel and challenging problems in the planning and delivery of healthcare in various contexts including hospitals, clinics, medical practices, etc. It is our hope that these papers will enhance our understanding of the key issues underlying the delivery of effective care in this rapidly changing environment. We welcome both analytical and empirical papers on any healthcare operations management topic, ranging from pandemics management to infection control within a hospital or community, clinical supply chain strategies, quality and variability management, telemedicine, the scheduling of surgeries within a hospital, capacity planning for community clinics, patient and staff scheduling, task prioritization in the emergency department, etc. All submissions must adhere to the format, style, and other established guidelines for regular M&SOM submissions. Manuscripts must be submitted by March 28, 2011 via the Internet, and authors must complete the submission process on the Manuscript Central website: <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/msom>. Authors should mention that the paper is being submitted for the special issue in a cover letter to the M&SOM editor. In addition, authors should note that in submitting a manuscript to be reviewed for this special issue, they should expect to serve as reviewers for other manuscripts. We expect the special issue to appear in mid 2012.