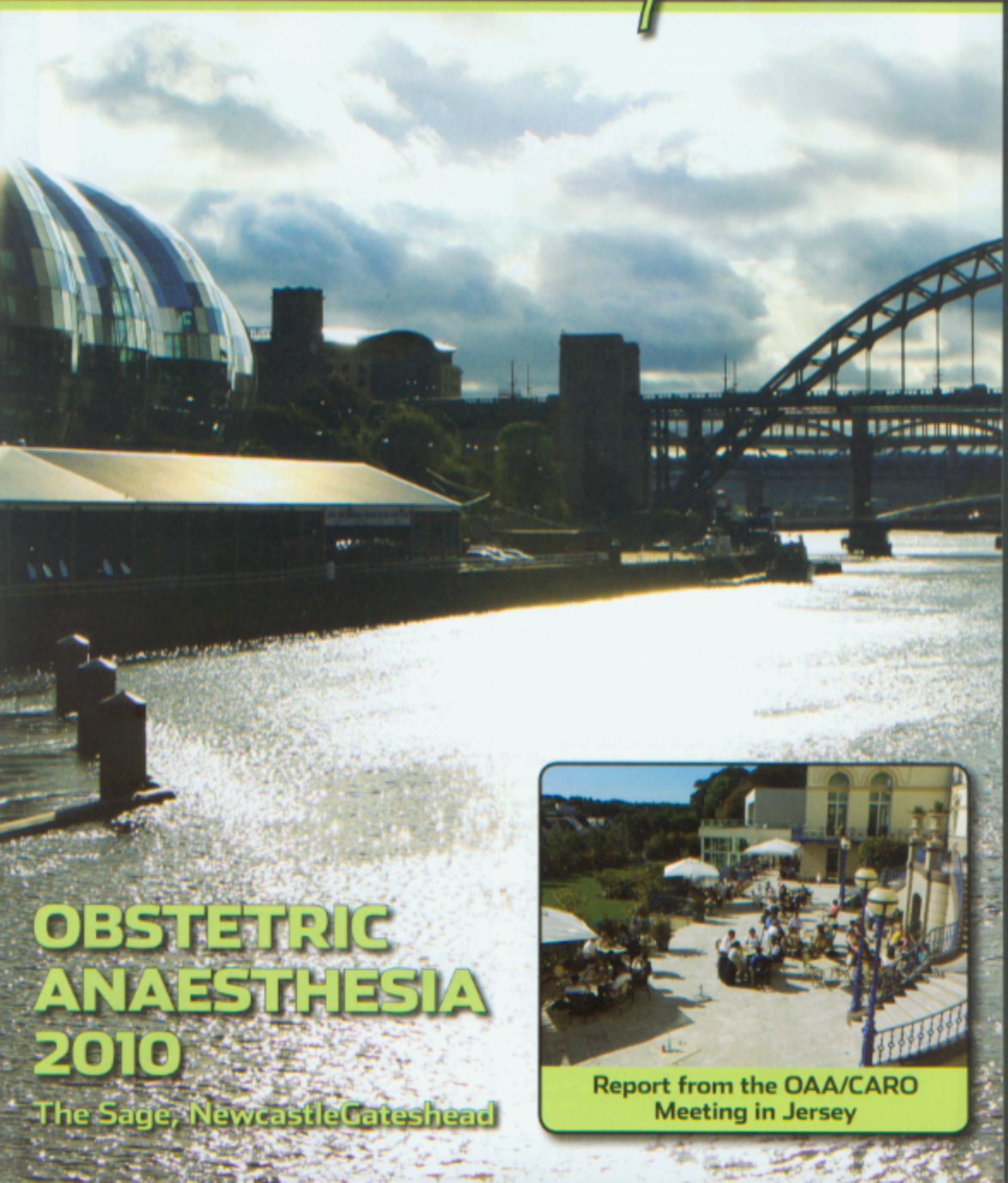




Obstetric Anaesthetists' Association

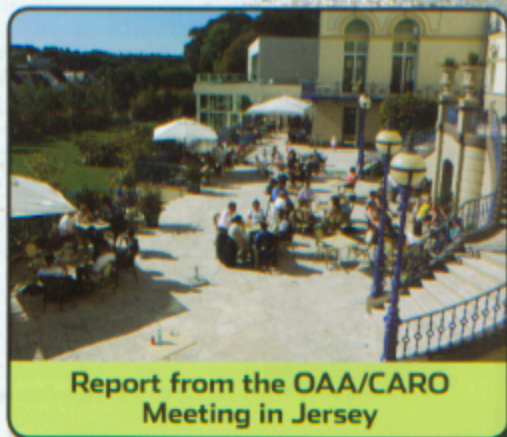
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OBSTETRIC ANAESTHESIA 2010

The Sage, NewcastleGateshead



**Report from the OAA/CARO
Meeting in Jersey**

OBSTETRIC ANAESTHESIA IN ROMANIA

A Kybele Trip, May 2008

In May 2008 I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to travel to Romania as part of a Kybele team. Kybele is a non-profit making organisation founded in 2004. Their goal is to prevent childbirth related injury and death, which affects millions of women and newborns each year. The organization brings together teams of healthcare professionals from around the world. They travel to host countries to provide teaching and training to improve health care for parturients. Since the time that Kybele has been founded, they have undertaken projects in Turkey, Croatia, Ghana, Georgia, Armenia, Romania and Brazil. Kybele also sponsors doctors and nurses from host countries to travel to US and European countries to observe childbirth practices there, and also to attend educational meetings.

Romania is a country in South Eastern Europe with a population of 21.5 million people. It is well known for the 24-year dictatorship of the Communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu. His dictatorship was a reign of terror, which impoverished Romanians and exhausted the Romanian economy. His leadership ended in his overthrow and execution in the Romanian Revolution of 1989. Romania has been a democratic country since. It became a European Union member state in 2007. Although there have been dramatic improvements in standards of living, the economy and healthcare, problems do still remain.

In 1989, Romania had the highest maternal mortality rate (MMR) in Europe. However, from 1990 to 2002, it has shown the largest percentage change for maternal mortality in Europe. In 2002, the MMR was 27/100,000 live births. Although this is an improvement, it is still more than double the MMR from the 2007 Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (13.95/100,000 maternities).

In May 2008 our Kybele team of 13 volunteers from the USA, UK and Australia, travelled to Romania. The team comprised 12 physicians (3 obstetricians, 8 anaesthetists and an intensive care physician with a special interest in peripartum critical care), and one midwife. We were lucky that our team leader, Virgil Manica, is originally from Romania, and took great delight in introducing us to his country.

The first few days of the trip were spent in Bucharest. Our team then divided into two groups. One group visited Polizu, a hospital providing obstetric services. My group visited the Municipal Hospital, a large teaching hospital adjacent to the medical school, which has approximately 800 in-patient beds. They estimate a delivery rate of 5000 per annum. We spent our time in the hospital observing practice, and discussing cases.

During the week, we arranged a conference for anaesthetic trainees at the Municipal Hospital. Our group gave several presentations on trainee-related topics. The meeting was very well attended and generated much discussion. We also arranged a conference for obstetricians at the Municipal hospital. Lecture topics included the effect of regional anaesthesia on the progress of labour, and provided a forum for a very active and animated debate.

Our group leaders and Romanian hosts also attended several meetings during the week, the aim of which was to progress with issues that had been raised by our Romanian hosts during a previous Kybele visit. There was a meeting with the chairman of the committee on Health, Ecology and Sports of the Romanian Senate. He agreed that there is a need for implementation of national guidelines and protocols for obstetric anaesthesia and postoperative pain management. This may in turn provide a resource to improve safety and uniformity in obstetric anaesthesia in Romania. The Kybele group succeeded in securing an offer of assistance at parliament level for both this and for approving medications for use in obstetric practice, which are not currently available in Romania (e.g. labetalol, magnesium sulphate and hydralazine). A meeting with the Secretary of State of the Romanian Health Ministry resulted in similar assurances, a fantastic result for the group. A meeting with the President of the Romanian Royal College of Physicians was an opportunity to discuss how to approve and implement national guidelines, and how to approve medications that are required.

Kybele has been asked to assist in the development of guidelines on obstetric anaesthesia in Romania.

At the end of the first week we travelled north to the beautiful resort of Sinaia. While there we attended the SRATI 2008, the Romanian society of Anaesthesia and Intensive Care Annual Congress. Several team members gave refresher course lectures in obstetric anaesthesia, which again were very well attended. As guests of Professor Dan Tulbure at the conference, we were also invited to social events every night of our stay in Sinaia, and experienced the "après conference" Romanian style. We had the opportunity to do some sight seeing in the region during a day off, which included a trip to Count Dracula's castle.

At the start of the second week in Romania the team split into four groups. We conducted site visits of four cities in Romania (Sibiu, Targu-Mures, Ploiesti, and Brasov). The aim of these trips was to determine if Kybele assistance would be helpful in these areas. My group travelled to Ploiesti, a city approximately 90 minutes north of Bucharest. The hospital we visited was Ploiesti Maternity hospital, a woman's hospital providing obstetric and gynaecology services. It has 400 beds and approximately 4000 deliveries per annum. We were warmly received by our hosts, and we spent 3 days observing practice and discussing many topics: from provision of obstetric anaesthesia services to case based discussions about patients.

We returned to Bucharest at the end of the second week to attend a meeting of the Romanian Society of Midwives. People had travelled from all over Romania to hear talks given by members of our group, and to discuss implementation of national guidelines for obstetric anaesthesia.

During our visit, we identified obstacles to the progression of obstetric anaesthesia services in Romania, which are common to all the areas that we visited. There is a shortage of doctors in Romania, mainly as a result of emigration; this has been compounded by Romania's entry to the European Union. In all the units that we visited, this means that it would be extremely difficult to safely cover a labour epidural service with demands such as we have in the UK. Equipment is also in short supply. Women are required to supply their own epidural kits, which cost 30 Euros. With an average monthly salary in the country of 320 Euros, this is simply not achievable for many people. There is also reluctance among many obstetricians to allow the expansion of anaesthetic services to their patients. Obviously some of these problems are beyond the scope of Kybele, but we do hope that the strategic assistance which we provided, and the discussions and debates that we had, will go some way to improve the birth experience for women in Romania.

Kybele will continue to assist Romanian clinicians with the development of national guidelines for obstetric anaesthesia. There will be continued collaboration in education and conferences. One of our Romanian hosts was identified as someone who would be keen to travel to the USA with Kybele sponsorship, to observe practice there and attend an obstetric anaesthetic conference.

The doctors whom we met in Romania work tirelessly to provide a good standard of care to their patients. Their knowledge and skills are excellent and it is lack of resources that hampers advances in care. I hope that what we were able to provide were contacts, links and resources in other countries; advice about developing their services; examples of our practice, and advancement of our hosts wish to standardise obstetric anaesthesia care in Romania.

I would strongly recommend a Kybele trip to people interested in working abroad. I went with the impression that I would be passing on my knowledge and skills, but had absolutely no idea how much I would learn and how it would advance my own practice. On a more personal note, I would also rate Romania highly for a holiday. It is a great country that I can not wait to return to.

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