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First World Congress 'Copper and Public Health' held in Athens

Copper's role in the fight against hospital-acquired infections

Athens, 20 November 2008. The first global congress on copper's role in fighting hospital-acquired infections took place in a central Athens hotel. Leading scientists from around the world presented the scientific evidence supporting the case for incorporating copper surfaces into healthcare environments to help reduce the risk of infection and to protect public health.

Hospital-acquired infections afflict thousands of patients world-wide, cause 90,000 deaths in the US and 5,000 in the UK and cost health service providers billions of pounds each year. While it is not possible to eliminate the risk of infection, it is estimated that infections could be reduced by more than 50% by introducing improved hygiene and patient management measures. The introduction of copper for frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, light switches, taps and grab rails, could provide an additional weapon in the fight against infection. This conference provided a platform to bring together experts from around the globe to present their scientific evidence in support of this case to the audience of Greek healthcare professionals.

The conference featured international experts from the UK, US, Germany and Greece, representing the disciplines of infection control, pathology, microbiology, hospital design, metallurgy and engineering. Presentations covered the problem of hospital-acquired infections – the organisms and the number of infections and deaths, the role of the environment in transmission of infection, the broad-spectrum antimicrobial efficacy of copper, the US EPA registration of copper as an antimicrobial material, practical considerations for producing copper products and architectural considerations for incorporating copper into hospital design.

The climax of the conference was a live videolink to Professor Tom Elliott, who presented the first results from the Selly Oak clinical trial which showed that, on a busy medical ward, copper taps, toilet seats and door handles had 90-100% fewer micro-organisms on their surfaces than their controls.

Professor Elliott said: “It’s what I would call an intelligent metal. The copper is quietly working away in the background, killing organisms all the time. It needs to be part of what we call a bundle of care in terms of an approach to preventing infection. This gives us another arm, another weapon to fight infection which is around us and challenging us all the time. So I would see this in addition to the measures we are taking at the moment.”

Further information and videos of the presentations are available upon request.

Notes to editors:

The Hellenic Copper Development Institute organised the 1st World Congress ‘Copper and Public Health’, at the Intercontinental Hotel, Athens, in co-operation with European Copper Institute, International Copper Association, Ltd and Copper Development Association, UK, under the auspices of the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Solidarity.

Conference Speakers:

Hospital Acquired Infections – The Problem

Professor Stefanos Geroulanos, Professor of Surgery at Zurich University and Director of the intensive-care unit at the Onassis Cardiology Centre, Greece.

Professor Helen Giamarellou, University General Hospital ‘Attikon’, Greece.

Professor Michael G. Schmidt, Vice chairman of Microbiology and Immunology, Medical University of South Carolina, US.

Copper’s Role in Fighting Infection

Dr Harold Michels, Senior Vice President Technology & Technical Services, Copper Development Association, Inc, US.

Professor Bill Keevil, Director of the Environmental Healthcare Unit, School of Biological Sciences, University of Southampton, UK.

Professor Tom Elliott, Consultant Microbiologist and Deputy Director of Medicine, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, UK.

Professor Dietrich H Nies, Director of Molecular Microbiology, Martin-Luther University, Halle–Wittenberg, Germany.

Introducing Copper Products into the Healthcare Environment

Dr Ann Noble, Chairman of RIBA’s ‘Architects for Health’, UK.

Mr Mark Tur, Technical Consultant, Copper Development Association, UK.

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