



2nd January 2021

Dear Orpheus members,

May I begin by wishing you all a Happy and Prosperous 2021. I chose to wait until after the festive season was over to write this greeting to you members. There seems to be a general desire to 'forget 2020' due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so I will focus on looking forward into the New Year.

However, it would be wrong not to think about 2020 and what it has meant to ORPHEUS as an organization and to us all as individual citizens. First and foremost, to all of you who have lost family or friends to Covid-19, my sincere commiserations for your loss. For the first time ever, we had to cancel the annual ORPHEUS conference in Portugal, and travel restrictions have severely decimated our usual international and national teaching activities. I am sure that you are as tired of Zoom meetings as I am but have also gained insight into the great possibilities of using this (or other) digital platforms for many of your meetings. We have adapted to not being constantly at the workplace, and I am sure many of us will never return exactly as before. For many of us I am sure we have been more interactive than normal!

When we have been forced to transfer our teaching activities to digital platforms, I cannot be truly happy that an organization such as ours could not have been more use. I have encouraged you before to share teaching materials through our website, but few have submitted their powerpoint presentations or filmed lectures. Considering that we have such an extensive network, think what a fantastic resource we could make available of high-quality filmed lectures covering several aspects of doctoral education! I hope that you agree that this might have been useful for some of you to have access to, so I will encourage you all again to consider making a contribution. I am preparing 3 lectures myself and will make them available very soon.

An interesting development within the EU is the creation of so-called *EU-universities*, whereby several existing universities are joined as a single entity (either the whole university or thematically) to create collaborative activities within research and education. If I understand their ambition correctly, the EU wishes to create an 'EU-university doctoral degree' that will be awarded to those attending the EU-university doctoral schools. The immediate response of many universities has been doubtful to this suggestion, wondering if it will ever be possible to agree on a common basis for such a degree, considering the variation in national regulations for doctoral education that make them not completely compatible for all such EU-university collaborative partners. This is where the *ORPHEUS label*, as a certification that the *ORPHEUS Best Practices* are achieved, could play a major role, as doctoral education interaction between universities with *ORPHEUS labels* would be relatively straightforward. As Karolinska Institutet has recently become a member of one such EU-university consortia (*Neurotech^{EU}*) then I have already had this type of discussion with the partner universities involved and have distributed the *ORPHEUS Best Practices* to them. Lifting this suggestion to the EU as a potential way forward will be one of my tasks for 2021. I hope that you will all consider using the *ORPHEUS self-evaluation process* with your own university to assess how well you are already adhering to the *ORPHEUS Best Practices*, and to be able to identify improvements that might be required should you wish to apply for an *ORPHEUS label*. The more of our members that have obtained self-evaluation certificates or labels the happier I will be.

With the start of 2021 looking like a continuation of autumn 2020, with continued high levels of infection in many countries and travel restrictions still enforced, we will soon have to make a decision about the format of the 2021 ORPHEUS annual conference. It will still be hosted by the University of Minho, and we will send out relevant information as soon as possible to assist in your planning for participation, as well as how we will deal with elections.

Remember that there is 'strength in numbers' and that 'two heads are (usually) better than one', so please consider contributing to ORPHEUS activities. These can be posted at our beautiful new website (<https://orpheus-med.org/>) if you first send them to Oksana (oksana.sulaieva@gmail.com). As usual, I would be very happy to hear from you if you have any suggestion for new activity, improvement to our organization, or if you would just like to touch base.

Bob