

Meet Walter Vena EYES Session chair at ECE 2022



Dr Walter Vena is a clinical assistant in endocrinology & metabolism at Humanitas Clinical and Research Hospital. His clinical and research interests focus on reproductive endocrinology and he will be chairing the EYES Session at ECE 2022. We spoke to him about his work, career and what he is looking forward to most at this year's Congress.

Tell us about your current role

I'm a clinical assistant, particularly involved in managing reproductive and bone disease patients, for example those undergoing hormone treatments due to breast or prostate cancer. I also do clinical research on male hypogonadism, erectile dysfunction, and the consequences of hormonal deprivation on bone health.

What more specifically are you presenting at ECE 2022?

I'm presenting some posters and I'm chairing the EYES Session, which is dedicated to reproductive technologies. So, I'm going to finally meet a lot of people that I've only spoken to over the internet so far!

One of my abstracts is on the impact of vertebral fractures in patients undergoing hormone deprivation treatment, such as breast and prostate cancer patients. I'm co-author on

another abstract investigating body composition and its impact on bone health amongst Klinefelter syndrome patients.. I will also be presenting the results of two meta-analyses: the first is on male health in relation to Covid-19 infection (e.g. testosterone levels and semen production), the other on the role of testosterone in bone metabolism, we know indeed that hypogonadism is a cause of osteoporosis in men we still need many studies to understand how much testosterone treatment can be helpful to prevent fragility fractures in this group of patients.

What are you looking forward to most at ECE 2022?

I'm finally going to meet a lot of people in person, the EYES network is very friendly but over the last couple of years all our interactions have been virtual. I'm also looking forward to meeting up with other friends and international colleagues at the event. ECE 2022 will be a great chance for everybody to get together and discuss new and interesting research.

What are you most proud of in your career so far?

I'm proud of the human side of my work because, although I'm busy with research projects, I'm mostly clinic based and do my best to maintain good patient doctor relationships. I think that this is really important, because my patients can realise the importance of my research work but still feel that they can trust me as their doctor. I think it's important to maintain trust in your relationship with your patients and I always try to keep that a priority.

What do you think are the biggest challenges in your field right now?

For me personally, it is the lack of research funding. It's really difficult to get funding for original research, so we often need to rely on more cost-effective research methods, like retrospective studies. I think that it's really difficult to have a stable researcher position, so for younger people like me to remain in research is very hard.

Clinically there are lots of interesting challenges for example. Our research on Klinefelter syndrome is uncovering new aspects and phenotypes which is helping us understand how to help these patients to improve their quality of life and, hopefully, preserve fertility. Similarly, the deeper understanding of physical, psychological and sexual-related changes in those patients receiving hormone deprivation therapies will be crucial for the next decades to improve these individuals quality of life, now that we are able to give them long term survival. From the patients' perspectives these are really big and important challenges.

Do you have any advice for aspiring endocrinologists?

To keep going. It's important to listen to your to your mentors, to take their advice and understand how they can help you. They are going to get you through the difficult times and keep you motivated. Also try to stay focussed on research that you find really interested and you really want to achieve something in. Having a strong and resilient attitude and being consistent is key to reaching your goals. For example, you might see a sports champion's success but you don't see all the training and preparation behind that, and research is very similar. Every day we work towards our clinical or research goals and a good mentor is helpful for keeping you motivated.

Tell us about your mentors?

I'm lucky I've had many during the past years. At first, Professor Romanelli in Rome was a great help through the early stages of my career, he really taught me a lot on the basics. After I moved to Milan, Dr Alessandro Pizzocaro was a very supportive mentor and encouraged me to do research and follow my own path. Also, I have to say thanks to Professor Lania and Professor Mazziotti, who are leading the way for me and helping me find my own dimension in research and to become a better clinician and researcher in the future.