The forthcoming SEMDSA congress promises to be a memorable academic event. Not only do we have an excellent faculty of eminent invited speakers attending, but have also had an enthusiastic response from local scientists based on the large number of abstracts received.

Our invited guests include both old friends – Mary Ann Banerji (State University of New York) and Mary Lee Vance (University of Virginia), as well as new visitors to SEMDSA – Richard Bergman (University of Southern California) and David Zitzmann (University of Muenster, Germany). Most topics were selected to reflect themes of topical interest. They span clinical and basic aspects of diabetes mellitus, pituitary disorders and andrology. Apart from eight plenary lectures, there will be four Meet-the-Professor sessions and delegates will be able to attend two of these.

I, have during my career, served on the organising committee for numerous SEMDSA congresses and have been chairperson for three: 2001, 2005 and 2009, which I have indicated will most likely be my last in that capacity. In addition, I have served as chairperson for three NOF congresses. I am, therefore, taking the liberty to share some personal reflections on SEMDSA congresses.

I first attended SEMDSA 35 years ago, in 1974. I was two years out of medical school and had not yet commenced my registrarship. That 1974 meeting was held at the campus of University of Pretoria jointly with SAGES (gastroenterology society). Larry Distiller, Harry Seftel, Barry Joffe and I travelled together from Jo’burg every day. David Streeten (late), an ex South African, was an invited speaker on mineralocorticoids. The next year, the congress was held at the Sunnyside Park hotel in Johannesburg, jointly with the Renal society. That, for me, was a career defining meeting. One of the guest speakers was Louis Avioli, and it was in his Division of Bone and Mineral Metabolism at Washington University in St. Louis that I, subsequently, trained as a fellow in endocrinology. In those early years, SEMDSA congresses were dominated by the scientific excellence of the Endocrinology Unit of the University of Cape Town – people such as Bernard Pimstone, WPU (Pete) Jackson, Arthur Vinik, Sol Epstein and Bob Millar come to mind. Our two named lectures, the Jackson and Pimstone lectures, are testament to this fact.

A SEMDSA congress provides a wonderful educational experience. One renews old friendships and makes new acquaintances. In my view, it is a pity that not much collaborative research has been generated, neither among the various academic centres nor between the academic and private sectors. Meetings of this nature certainly provide such opportunities.

I have to end with a note of concern for the future. I have found it increasingly difficult to organise SEMDSA congresses, this year’s one particularly so. I attribute this entirely to difficulty in obtaining funding and sponsorships from the pharmaceutical industry. There is an inexplicable reluctance for even the biggest companies, global and regional, to sponsor overseas speakers or events, such as the banquet, and this was so even before the present economic meltdown.

Fortunately, we have over the decades had the unwavering support of a core of dedicated stalwarts, well known to us all, without whom SEMDSA could not have survived and, indeed, become as strong and vibrant as it is today.

Finally, I must thank Shelley Harris for her customary professionalism. Indeed, SEMDSA is Shelley.

Roy Shires
Chairperson: Organising Committee
SEMDSA Congress, 2009