

# International Issues: The EAYNT

## Ten years of unifying European junior neurologists

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The growing pan-European labor market for young doctors is characterized by a heterogeneity in remuneration, national health care systems, and training curricula. A recent survey on postgraduate medical training documented a varying level of job satisfaction in Europe based on low salaries, working conditions, and career prospects.<sup>1,2</sup> Subsequently, a south-to-north migration of young doctors has been observed within Europe, and a paucity of neurologists is expected in certain regions in the near future.<sup>2</sup>

While neurologists in training and early practice represent a substantial number of doctors and are critically involved in patient care, their voice was almost nonexistent in decision-making processes of the European neurology scene about 15 years ago. The driving forces for the founding of the European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees (EAYNT) in 1999 included the need for an independent representation of junior neurologists in a changing pan-European labor market, the collection and transmission of information about medical specialization and disparities in working conditions throughout Europe, and the desire to provide a framework for collective expression and proposal development on behalf of these physicians. Junior representatives from 2 European neurologic working groups—the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS; Benedikt Schoser, Konrad Rejdak, Judit Afra) and the European Neurological Society (ENS; David Brassat, Axel Petzold, Canan Ozsancak)—came together and the EAYNT was born.

**THE OBJECTIVES** Based on the previously mentioned needs, the EAYNT's founding objectives were to improve clinical training and provide access to exchange programs and career opportunities for European junior neurologists.<sup>3</sup> Since 1999, young colleagues from 15 different European countries have held office within the EAYNT (table, figure 1) and were crucially involved in lobbying activities on

behalf of their colleagues. Of note, membership in the EAYNT is free of charge and is granted to doctors and scientists in training.

### THE BEGINNING AND CONTINUOUS SUCCESS

After a 1-year transition period, the first EAYNT officers (Konrad Rejdak, Axel Petzold, Rob Hadden) were elected and the organization registered under Brussels law in 2000.<sup>3</sup> In the beginning, one of our major aims was to build a platform for communication among junior neurologists. Get-togethers were organized at European conferences and announced in *Neurology*<sup>®</sup> journals and on the Internet. The events were successful and the number of committed members from all over Europe was on the rise. European neurology organizations became aware of our activities and were impressed by the enthusiasm with which we accomplished our projects. As a result, “Young Neurologists Sessions” covering topics off the beaten track, and presented by senior and junior physicians, have become an indispensable part of European neurology conferences.

Many of these meetings are an integral part of postgraduate education and the EAYNT has worked to raise awareness of the need for affordable congress participation, including reduced registration fees for neurologists in training, reasonably priced accommodations, and financial support for travel. We launched campaigns to raise funds for travel grants and were successful in convincing companies to provide fellowships, e.g., the EAYNT-Schering fellowship, as well as stroke and epilepsy research grants. One well-remembered initiative was the arrangement of a 20-British-pound-per-night accommodation during the World Federation of Neurology Meeting (WFN) in 2001 in London. Since our initial efforts, European congresses have continued to fund conference attendance by rewarding scientific work based on abstract quality. In addition, an increasing number of European organizations now offer short- and

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*Disclosure:* Author disclosures are provided at the end of the article.

**Table** Chronology of European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees Officers, 2000–2011

	President	Secretary	Treasurer
2000–2003	Konrad Rejdak (Poland)	Axel Petzold (Germany/UK)	Rob Hadden (UK)
2003–2004	Jane Pritchard (UK)	Lili Luhtimovschi (Moldova)	Ronnie Traubner (Slovakia)
2004–2005	Irena Dujmovic (Serbia)	Mikolaj Pawlak (Poland)	Albrecht Günther (Germany)
2005–2006	Sabrina Sacconi (Italy/France)	Adam Niezgoda (Poland)	Walter Struhal (Austria)
2006–2007	Cristian Falup-Pecurariu (Romania)	Anna Dimova (Macedonia)	A. Kemal Erdemoglu (Turkey)
2007–2008	Walter Struhal (Austria)	Johann Sellner (Switzerland)	Eva Havlikova (Slovakia)
2008–2009	Johann Sellner (Germany)	Laszlo K. Sztriha (Hungary)	Oana Tarta-Arsene (Romania)
2009–2010	Laszlo K. Sztriha (UK)	Cristian Falup-Pecurariu (Romania)	Martin Rakusa (Slovenia)
2010–2011	Martin Rakusa (Slovenia)	Edina Timea Varga (Denmark)	Lucas Schirmer (Germany)
2011–2012	Edina Timea Varga (Denmark)	Krisztina Vörös (Hungary)	Natalja Holler (Germany)

long-term fellowships to junior neurologists. These educational initiatives improve clinical and scientific training and, due to these developments, we have been able to focus our attention on achieving other goals.

As our membership continued to grow, we formed subspecialty groups that offer a platform for interaction and development of joint projects among our members. These subspecialty groups included stroke, multiple sclerosis, and neurorehabilitation, and have enjoyed excellent reputations and produced several PubMed-retrievable position papers.<sup>4,5</sup> The EAYNT also successfully lobbied for active member participation on education committees and scientific panels of the Danube Neurology Symposium, ENS, EFNS, and WFN.

Over the years, the EAYNT has successfully initiated various projects for junior neurologists and made an impact on the European neurology scene. The demand for activities on behalf of our colleagues is reflected by the increasing number of annual

EAYNT events and programs, the positive feedback, and membership numbers that are expected to reach 600 in 2010. The EAYNT has maintained its independence and is recognized as a reliable partner by European neurology organizations. As a result, we have been asked to participate in the foundation of the International Working Group of Young Neurologists and Trainees that is affiliated with the WFN, and we were critically involved in the startup of young neurologist activities within the World Federation of Neurorehabilitation.<sup>4</sup>

### CURRENT CHALLENGES AND EVOLVING GOALS Preparation for the 21st century.

What are the requirements for a 21st-century neurologist? Defining such standards is a challenge amid the converging political, economic, and social developments within the European Union. Curricula, assessment methods, and even the definition of postgraduate training vary widely between European countries.<sup>6–8</sup> For example, the duration of neurology residency training may vary from 3 to 7 years.<sup>6</sup> These discrepancies raise the issue of whether competencies acquired in one country are equivalent in another country.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that standardized training would simplify the migration of neurologists within EU countries, and the first crucial step in attaining this is to define a core curriculum. The EAYNT has launched a task force with the goal of harmonizing neurology training in Europe.

**Promotion of clinical skills.** Improvement of clinical competence remains the basis for our efforts. Indeed, the most frequently accessed sections on our homepage concern Grants and Teaching Courses. We encourage colleagues to attend courses and workshops in Europe to improve their knowledge and gain insight into the broad European perspective. Recent courses organized by the EAYNT, such as Autonomic Nervous System Disorders (January 2009)<sup>10</sup> and the Cochrane Workshop on Evidence-

**Figure 1** European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees past presidents Johann Sellner (Germany, left) and Walter Struhal (Austria) at the European Federation of Neurological Societies conference 2009 in Firenze, Italy



**Figure 2** Participants of the tour to the Department of Neurology at the Charite Universitätsmedizin Berlin during the European Neurological Society conference 2010 in Berlin, Germany



Based Neurology at the Danube Neurology meeting I (October 2009),<sup>11</sup> were very popular and will be continued in the future.

**Networking among junior neurologists.** Promoting friendships among colleagues from different countries and supporting the understanding of different cultural approaches toward neurology are fundamental ideas of the EAYNT. These ambitious aims are accomplished with get-togethers and workshops for young neurologists at various meetings. Proposals for official congress workshops, such as “Pimp Up Your Residency” or “Armamentarium for 21st-Century Neurologists,” have been submitted and will add a refreshing perspective to education at conferences. Another of our organized conference activities is hospital visits in the city where the event occurs (figure 2). These tours have garnered considerable interest as participants are able to witness the spectrum of European culture and compare distinct neurology practices.

### PROMOTION OF SCIENTIFIC EXCELLENCE

We believe that discussion of personal scientific work at the conference level is an important component of the education of a 21st-century neurologist. We therefore try to motivate our members to apply for scientific fellowships, carry out research projects, and present their work at European conferences. Moreover, we have asked several congress organizations to grant young colleagues the opportunity to serve as poster co-chairs. This promotes discussion and acknowledgment of scientific work as well as the acceptance of responsibility at an early career stage.<sup>12</sup>

**THE OUTLOOK** The EAYNT is looking back at a short but remarkable history as it celebrates its 10th

anniversary in 2010. An open-door policy with regard to involvement in the EAYNT remains the mainstay of our organization and its success. We are eager to continue our work, to face new challenges, and to observe the emerging neurology field in Europe as we continue to prepare our members for the 21st century.

EAYNT events in 2011 are scheduled at conferences of the ENS in Lisbon, Portugal (<http://www.congex.ch/ens2011.html>), the EFNS in Budapest, Hungary (<http://efns2011.efns.org/>), and the WFN in Marrakesh, Morocco (<http://www2.kenes.com/wcn/Pages/Home.aspx>). For updates on our activities and announcements of upcoming events, refer to our homepage at [www.eaynt.org](http://www.eaynt.org).

### DISCLOSURE

All authors were previous EAYNT officers. Dr. Struhal, Dr. Sztriha, and Dr. Rejdak report no disclosures. Dr. Petzold has served on a scientific advisory board for and received funding for travel from Novartis; serves on the editorial board of *Multiple Sclerosis International*; and received the YNT-Schering fellowship for clinical training in multiple sclerosis. Dr. Sellner reports no disclosures.

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