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EVOLUTION, CURRENT STATUS, AND WAY FORWARD FOR THE ASIAN OCEANIAN ASSOCIATION OF NEUROLOGY

The Asian and Oceanian Association of Neurology (AOAN) was established in 1961¹ with the primary aim of promoting neurologic advancement via the exchange of ideas for the development of education programs in neurology. Another major aim of the association is to encourage scientific research geared toward neurologic diseases that are a major health burden in the Asian-Oceanian countries. Charles Poser (World Federation of Neurology [WFN]) and Shigeo Okinaka (Japan) were pivotal in the development of this association and the inaugural Asian Oceanian Congress of Neurology (AOCN) was held in Nippon Teshi Center, October 7–10, 1962, under the leadership of Professor Okinaka. Since then, various countries have hosted the AOCN (table). The 14th AOCN took place in Macao, China, March 2–5, 2014.

Over the years, AOCN has consistently brought together neurologists from the various member countries and has thus established itself as an academic congress serving the needs of physicians in the Asian and Oceanian realm. The membership of the association has grown over the years and we expect active involvement of more Asian countries in coming years. The last decade has seen successful conferences held in New Delhi, India, and Melbourne, Australia, and expansion of AOAN academic activities at various regional and local centers. Workshops, seminars, symposia, academic exchange programs, the launch of the official AOAN journal, and advocacy and research initiatives have transformed AOAN to a dynamic organization. In 2014, AOAN moved to a biennial conference (AOCN) cycle with the congress in Macao. The president of AOAN, Dr. Man Mohan Mehndiratta, and the Scientific Committee of AOCN 2014 worked to create a platform for sessions of regional organizations of neurologic subspecialties as well as a WFN symposium, thereby attesting to their goal of establishing

outreach programs. AOCN 2008 in New Delhi was attended by WFN and World Stroke Organization (WSO) officials (Vladimir Hachinski, Johan Aarli, Raad Shakir, Oded Abramsky, Geoffrey Donnan, and Stephen Davis) and was addressed by the globally well-known president of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam.

Recently, the Asia initiative program of the WFN (under the chairmanship of Ryuji Kaji) has been a boost for AOAN. WFN provided an educational grant to AOAN for establishment of infrastructure, furthering of educational activities, and development of research and advocacy programs.

Research collaboration among Asian countries has been historically suboptimal. Funding support from the AOAN has greatly influenced the ability of countries such as Japan, China, Australia, South Korea, Singapore, and India, among others, to perform high-impact research. In recent times, several collaborative projects have been performed and published by member countries. A stroke registry of young Asian women (9 countries) and an Asian cerebral venous thrombosis study (13 countries) were recently completed and published.² We hope to see many such collaborative research projects focusing on cost-effective interventions for stroke, infections, and epilepsy from this region. In 2011, AOAN adopted the open access journal *Neurology Asia*, edited by C.T. Tan. Now quarterly, the content focuses on tropical and Asian neurology.

Future endeavors. Education and training of physicians in neurology is a priority for AOAN. Developing standardized training programs and courses for countries where there is an undersupply of neurologists are other priorities. A grant from the American Brain Foundation allowed 2 physicians from Afghanistan to be trained in collaboration with support from Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan. These 2 physicians have now completed 2 years of comprehensive neurology training in Pakistan and are currently transitioning to

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Table Various countries that have hosted the Asian Oceanian Congress of Neurology	
Congress	Location
1st	Tokyo, Japan
2nd	Melbourne, Australia
3rd	Bombay, India
4th	Bangkok, Thailand
5th	Manila, Philippines
6th	Taiwan
7th	Bali, Indonesia
8th	Tokyo, Japan
9th	Seoul, Korea
10th	Manila, Philippines
11th	Singapore
12th	New Delhi, India
13th	Melbourne, Australia

Afghanistan to start a neurology training program in their home country. In addition, the WFN provided funding to organize the first neurology certificate course in Afghanistan that was successfully completed in 2012.³ AOAN will be extending financial and expertise support for continuing medical education (CME) in Afghanistan. Preparations are under way to start a 3-year neurology training program in Afghanistan in 2014. We plan to use this model for other developing Asian countries, especially Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos.

AOAN in collaboration with the WFN envisions holding CME programs in countries that have limited resources with the long-term goal of upholding standards of neurologic care provided in these areas. Central Asian countries including Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have not been able to play an active role as part of AOAN. We hope to increase collaboration with these countries not only with current practitioners of neurology but also those early in their career to further neurologic education, research, and advocacy. The Indian Academy of Neurology and Chinese Neurological Society (representing the most populous countries of Asia) are members of WFN and have contributed to the growth and development of AOCN.⁴ A young neurologists program (initiated and headed by Man Mohan Mehndiratta in India and Tissa Wijeratne in Australia) is also a promising initiative. Under this program, young trainees will travel to developing countries to organize and teach courses in neurology. The Korean Neurological Society in 2012 organized a Neurology Education in Asia Colloquium. This generated many ideas and discussion points for promotion of neurologic education in a highly

heterogeneous and diversified group of Asian countries. A recent article highlighted these issues and suggested how to bridge gaps in education and care in Asian countries.⁵

Publication of our journal with the help of a reputed international publisher and indexing in PubMed are 2 major future goals for the journal's growth and impact.

An important factor for the growth of AOAN is its synergy with other organizations and stakeholders. We plan to work closely with the WFN, American Academy of Neurology, European Academy of Neurology, WSO, and the International League against Epilepsy, as well as regional organizations like the Asian Neurological Association and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, to exchange faculty and arrange joint sessions.

Discussion. The challenges are many, but great opportunity exists for AOAN to implement strong and productive initiatives. Public awareness and advocacy related to neurologic diseases, development of regional and local neurology forums, and facilitation of training and mentorship efforts are important areas of work for AOAN in the present Asian context.

We expect the Asia initiative program of WFN to be a continuous source for inspiration, ideas, and financial and human resource support. We hope to see growth and transformation of AOAN, likely to be renamed the Asian Academy of Neurology, into a dynamic academy for promoting neurologic care, awareness, and education and improving quality of life for more than 60% of the global population.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Dr. Man Mohan Mehndiratta: conceived and designed the manuscript, data acquisition, critical review of the manuscript. Dr. Prachi Mehndiratta: critical review of the manuscript and redrafted the manuscript. Dr. Ching-Piao Tsai: reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Ryuji Kaji: reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Natasha Singh Gulati: database search. Dr. Mohammad Wasay: drafted and reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Richard Macdonell: reviewed the manuscript.

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DISCLOSURE

M. Mehndiratta is President of the Asian Oceanian Association of Neurology. P. Mehndiratta and C. Tsai report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. R. Kaji is currently Chair of the Asia initiative, WFN. N. Singh Gulati, M. Wasay, and R. Macdonell report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

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