The World Federation of Neurology

A commonly asked question is, ‘What exactly does the WFN do?’ The WFN was established in 1957 and recently underwent major organisational change under the leadership of Lord Walton and Dr James Toole. It established a Secretariat in London, revised its constitution and by-laws, and redefined its purpose. The Federation has now initiated some of its priority programmes and revitalized its website (http://www.wfneurology.org), which is used increasingly to complement our official publications, the Journal of the Neurological Sciences, edited by Dr Robert Lisak, and World Neurology, under Dr Jagjit Chopra. We are at a turning point not only in modernising our structure, but also in reorienting our philosophy as an incorporated charitable organization for the cause of neurology.

Our primary mission centres on the improved care of patients with neurological disorders through the education of physicians worldwide. The WFN does not intend to compete with national or regional groups who can address their own educational and research needs with considerable and far better finesse. Rather, we focus our attention on more global concerns and try to implement programmes of international consequence. We seek to achieve greater worldwide recognition of our discipline, and make the prevention and treatment of neurological conditions a high priority for the health policies of governments.

Specifically, we endeavour to encourage and assist the education of young neurologists in the hope of improving patient care (Bergen 2002). To achieve this goal, the Education Committee chaired by Dr Ted Munsat, a trustee of the WFN, has developed a number of successful programmes including:

- a continuing medical education (CME) programme conducted with 31 national neurology societies using Continuum, generously donated by the American Academy of Neurology, and Seminars in Clinical Neurology that the WFN publishes periodically;
- visiting professorships in Zambia, one of the most satisfactory initiatives in neurological education for non-neurologists (Birbeck 2002);
- residency training in Honduras (Medina & Munsat 2001), which graduated the first four residents last year, all returning to their country after fellowship training abroad;
- an educational survey to assess the effectiveness of our efforts as described in detail on our website.

The Research Committee under the leadership of Dr Roger Rosenberg has also launched new initiatives with the help of Dr Francois Boller, Chair of the Publications and Website Committee, to disseminate up-to-date information about recent advances in therapy. Entitled ‘Research Advances in Neurology’, this WFN website covers recent research advances in clinical and basic neuroscience in each area of some 30 research groups. These reviews emphasise therapeutics, including those treat-
ments available and affordable in developing countries. They are intended to provide neurologists everywhere with an electronic syllabus on important new therapies and this will be updated every 6 months.

The meetings of the World Congress of Neurology (WCN) every 4 years serve as the most effective venue for presenting scientific achievements and interaction between delegates of varied backgrounds and perspectives, as attested by the highly successful WCN 2001 held in London, which attracted some 7000 registrants. The Australian Association of Neurology hopes to make the next Congress in Sydney equally memorable under the direction of Dr Bill Carroll, who also serves the WFN as a trustee. A preplanning meeting is scheduled at the Congress venue on 6–8 July 2003 in conjunction with the Council of Delegates Meeting.

We also work closely with regional neurological organizations to improve communication between member societies and to encourage their continued participation and interaction. To further facilitate the networking of information, Dr Richard Godwin-Austen, Secretary-Treasurer General, has recently initiated a plan to organise a joint meeting between the WFN and regional groups that otherwise would be unable to hold a congress. These conferences will take place between WCN meetings, e.g. in 2007, 2 years after the 2005 WCN. We are currently soliciting applications from regional groups who might be interested in this new venture.

Various local neurological societies and nongovernmental groups share our common interest in advancing neuroscience and its related fields. Dr Johan Aarli, as First Vice President, leads the Public Relations and WHO Liaison Committee. This effort will enhance issues of stroke and brain function within the WHO framework and coordinate various activities essential for the goals of WFN including:

- a Project Atlas to assist WHO in preparing a catalogue of neurological resources on a global scale;
- a Tobacco Control Programme, one of the goals of the WHO;
- enhanced visibility of neurology to improve the mission of the WFN;
- joint effort with psychiatry to remove the stigma of ‘mental illness’;
- an international campaign against stroke in collaboration with the International Stroke Society (Bogousslavsky et al. 2003).

The WFN primarily serves countries in need of external support to enhance their neurological education. We ask affluent countries for resources that can then be distributed effectively. Because our plans to promote the neurosciences worldwide will take a large amount of work to prepare and initiate, we will need to generate interest and energy from all member societies, particularly in developed and richer countries. To achieve these objectives, we must explore a number of options for more active fundraising to attract charitable donations in support of our effort to advance neurological research and education globally.

We are anxious to improve the value of membership of the WFN and to achieve the missions and objectives of our newly incorporated Federation.

REFERENCES


