

The development of international cooperation of epilepsy in Asia

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Abstract

The development of international cooperation among epilepsy professionals in Asia has three milestones: the Epilepsy International Congress in Kyoto in 1981, the formation of the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization in Shizuoka in 1991, and the 4th Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Congress in Nagano in 2002. The Epilepsy International Congress in Kyoto was the beginning of awareness of the importance of international exchange in Asia. The Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization was formed to promote exchange and cooperation among national epilepsy organizations in Asia. Since 1996, Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress has been held two yearly, the first was in Seoul. The 4th Asian and Oceanian Congress in 2002 showed great progress in the scientific program and the large number of participants. In 1996, the Commission on Asian and Oceanian Affairs was formed by the International League Against Epilepsy to promote the development of epilepsy in the region. Since 2000, the Commission has organized epilepsy teaching workshops in various economically less advantaged countries in Asia. The Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Academy is presently being planned to further promote epilepsy education in the region.

1981 EPILEPSY INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS IN KYOTO

From the perspective of an epileptologist in Japan, the history of inter-country exchange of medical professionals related to epilepsy care in Asia has three important milestones. The first was the Epilepsy International Congress in Kyoto, Japan in 1981. This was the first international meeting of epilepsy held in Asia. The Congress was also the first attempt in the world to jointly organize three international congresses related to neurosciences. Each of these congresses was previously held four yearly. The Congresses were: the International Congress of Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology, followed by the Epilepsy International Congress and the World Congress of Neurology. The Epilepsy International Congress was a four-day event, took place between the other two Congresses. The first day of the Epilepsy International Congress was held jointly with International Congress of Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology with topics including serum anti-epileptic drug concentration and EEG. The last day of the Epilepsy International Congress was held jointly with World Congress of Neurology with a session on

functional asymmetry of the cerebral hemisphere. Such arrangement in scientific program attracted neuroscience delegates with wide variety of interests.¹

Over 800 delegates worldwide, including a sizable number from Asian and Oceanian countries, attended the Epilepsy International Congress. They were from Australia, India, Indonesia, Korea, New Zealand, and Taiwan. This meeting was epoch-making in the sense that the Epilepsy International Congress organizers in Japan became aware for the first time that a significant number of colleagues in Asia were enthusiastic about sharing their knowledge and experiences of epileptology and epilepsy care. This awareness prompted certain medical schools and institutions in Japan, including special centers for epilepsy, departments of neurology and neurosurgery, to welcome medical professionals from neighboring countries. On the level of professional societies, exchange of scientists with special interests also began between Korea, Taiwan and Japan.

The National Epilepsy Center in Shizuoka, the only institution for comprehensive care of epilepsy in Japan, started to receive medical doctors from abroad for training in clinical

epileptology, for duration ranging from a few weeks to years. Over the past 2 decades these doctors have come from Canada, China, Korea, Fiji, Mongolia, Peru, Philippines and Taiwan.

The 1981 Epilepsy International Congress also stimulated the formation of patient based organizations in Japan. Following completion of the Epilepsy International Congress, the Japan Epilepsy Association, the national chapter of the International Bureau for Epilepsy, organized a public seminar in Tokyo. It was the first meeting on recent advances in care of epilepsy for the public in Japan. Over 1,000 delegates, including some from Korea and Taiwan, attended the one-day meeting chaired by JA Wada from Canada. The faculty members of the seminar were: PM Jeavons (UK) who spoke on childhood epilepsy, H Gastaut (France) on Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, CA Tassinari (Italy) on EEG and polygraph, EA Rodin (USA) on management of drug-resistant epilepsy, and HE Booker (USA) on assessment of epilepsy. A proceeding of the seminar in Japanese was published and circulated by the Japan Epilepsy Association.²

ASIAN AND OCEANIAN EPILEPSY ORGANIZATION

The second milestone was the formation of the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization that took place on the occasion of the 25th Annual Meeting of the professional based Japan Epilepsy Society held in Shizuoka in 1991 with M Seino as President. Six speakers from Korea, China, Taiwan, Sri Lanka and India were invited to present their work at a special workshop on "Epilepsy in Asia." They presented scientific papers and also introduced their experiences of epilepsy care in their own countries. The speakers and the papers presented were: MC Maheshwari (India): Forceps delivery as a risk factor in epilepsy, N Senanayake (Sri Lanka): Juvenile myoclonic epilepsy in Sri Lanka, JJ Tsai (Taiwan): Status of follow-up of patients with epilepsy in an epilepsy clinic, Zhi-Ping Qu (China): A preliminary observation on auto-cholinergic synapse dysfunction in epilepsy, LW Wu (China): Sleep grand mal: all-night polygraphic EEG recording, K Huh (Korea): Can we predict carbamazepine responsiveness in partial epilepsy? Their presentations were published in the Japanese Journal of Psychiatry and Neurology in 1992.³ On the following day, the Japan Epilepsy Association held a public seminar in Shizuoka where psychosocial issues including drivers'

licenses, anti-marriage laws, and public stigma in Asian countries were presented and discussed.⁴

It was not surprising that the gathering in Shizuoka led to formation of an association of epileptologists in Asia. Founding members were those invited to the 25th Japan Epilepsy Society Meeting in addition to PJ Wang (Taiwan). This group was named the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization. A simple constitution was drafted with the objective as to strengthen kinship among medical professionals involved in epilepsy in Asia and Oceania. M Seino (Japan) was elected the first Chair. Further discussions took place during the epilepsy society meetings of Korea, Taiwan and Japan. A formal constitution of the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization was proposed in 1996 and approved in 1998, in which the membership was defined as: "The relevant professional society or group in the Asian and Oceanian region shall appoint one representative to the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization. The definition of a national society shall be decided by the General Assembly." The number of Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization members is currently over 20. Following the formation of Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization, which is an organization for medical professionals, the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Association was formed in 1996 as a parallel organization for people with epilepsy and their families. CC Park (Korea, 1998-2000) and MS Hsi (Taiwan, 2000-2002) served as presidents of the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Association. National delegates were from Australia, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and Sri Lanka. In the last few years, both Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization and Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Association continued to serve as grass root vehicles to nurture those interested in epileptology and the social aspects of epilepsy, and to promote improvement in the quality of life of people with epilepsy.

One of the fruits of the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Organization was the organization of epilepsy congress in Asia. The inaugural Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Congress was held in Seoul (1996) presided by BI Lee, followed by the second congress in Taipei (1998) presided by TT Wong, the third in New Delhi (2000) presided by MC Maheshwari, and the fourth in Nagano (2002) presided by T Yamauchi.

COMMISSION ON ASIAN AND OCEANIAN AFFAIRS

On the occasion of the inauguration of the Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress in Seoul in 1996, the International League Against Epilepsy Executive Committee founded a regional committee for Asia and Oceania and named it the Commission on Asian and Oceanian Affairs. The goal of the Commission was to advise the International League Against Epilepsy Executive Committee on the development of new chapters in the region, to promote and function as a structure for regional cooperation and development in epilepsy. The International League Against Epilepsy Executive Committee nominated 12 Commission members for the term 1997 to 2001. They were; M Seino (Chair, Japan), LL Cabral-Lim (Philippines), D Gunawan (Indonesia), S Harvey (Australia), BI Lee (Korea), SCLi (China), SH Lim (Singapore), MC Maheshwari (India), N Senanayake (Sri Lanka), CT Tan (Malaysia), JJ Tsai (Taiwan), and P Visudhiphan (Thailand). In 2001, 7 Commission members were elected for the term 2001 to 2005. The newly appointed members were; CT Tan (Chair, Malaysia), S Harvey (Australia), S Jain (India), SH Lim (Singapore), JJ Tsai (Taiwan), P Visudhiphan (Thailand), and K Yagi (Japan).

Since 2000 the Commission has organized epilepsy teaching workshops to provide updates in epilepsy in economically less advantaged areas in Asia. They were held in Hanoi in Vietnam, Bandung in Indonesia, Yangon in Myanmar, Ulan Bator in Mongolia and Kathmandu in Nepal. The faculty members were from Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Taiwan. A large number of local doctors have participated in the Workshops, which were held for one and a half to two days. The topics covered were concepts of epilepsy, epidemiology, seizure and syndrome classification, EEG and neuro-imagings, drug and surgical treatment, socio-psychological issues and more specific topics such as epilepsy among women and the elderly.

Following the organizational structure in Europe, the Commission for Asian and Oceanian Affairs is also taking increasingly active role in the organization of the Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress. The Chair of Commission for Asian and Oceanian Affairs is the Co-Chair of the Scientific Affairs Committee of the 5th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress to be held in Bangkok.

4th ASIAN AND OCEANIAN EPILEPSY CONGRESS IN NAGANO, JAPAN

The 4th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress was the third milestone in the history of the epilepsy movement in Asia and Oceania. It was held in Karuizawa in Nagano, Japan from September 11 to 14, 2002. The scientific program consisted of 4 symposia, 2 workshops, 8 didactic lectures and the ILAE/IBE/WHO Global Campaign Against Epilepsy in South East Asia and the Western Pacific Regions symposium. Participants numbered 870, with 612 from Japan, and the rest from Asia and Oceania countries and elsewhere. The Organizing Committee provided a traveling bursary (AOEC Fellowship) for 50 young investigators from Asian countries, who would not have been able to attend the Congress without the financial assistance. It is hoped that such traveling bursary will continue to be offered in the future congresses. A proceeding of the 4th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress is now in the process of being published as a supplement of Epilepsia.

Following the 4th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress in Nagano, some 20 participants from various Asian countries were invited to visit the National Epilepsy Center in Shizuoka, which provided comprehensive care for people with epilepsy. The participants were also invited to a seminar on "Epilepsy in Asia." Most of the speakers were successful recipients of the AOEC Fellowship. The participants included 5 each from China and Japan, 4 from India, 2 each from Indonesia, Malaysia and Nepal, one each from Germany, Korea, Mongolia, Philippines, Singapore, and Sri Lanka. A short proceeding based on the presentations was published.⁵

THE FUTURE

Currently International League Against Epilepsy has some 75 national chapters worldwide. Only 10 of these are in the Asian and Oceanian region. Similarly, the International Bureau for Epilepsy has 10 chapters in this region out of 55 worldwide. There is a need to increase chapters of both International League Against Epilepsy and International Bureau of Epilepsy in the region as structure to promote the development of epilepsy.

In most of these chapters in Asia and Oceania, national meetings relevant to epilepsy are held every year. The presentations of these meetings and that of the regional conferences were published as proceedings or appear in journals published in the region. Some of these journals

are: Journal of Asia Epilepsy and Asia Neuroscience Research Society based in Hong Kong, Journal of Clinical Neuroscience based in Australia, Journal of the Japan Epilepsy Society, *Epilepsia* Supplement, and Neurological Journal of South East Asia. Although most of these publications are not circulated widely, they provide valuable scientific documentation. There is a need to archive these valuable published resources.

The third organization in addition to the Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Organization and Commission for Asian and Oceanian Affairs will be the Asian and Oceanian Epilepsy Academy, which is in the process of being formed. The objectives and activities of the Academy are similar to the European Epilepsy Academy; organization of educational courses, organizing the educational program during Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress, training of trainers in epilepsy, certification of epileptologists, establishment of a multinational educational network, and a "website academy" as a forum for discussion.⁷ The Academy is expected to be an important vehicle to further promote the development of epilepsy in the region.

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