

PRESENT AND FUTURE OF NEUROLOGY IN PAKISTAN

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Neurology started as a department in early nineteen sixties in Dow Medical College and King Edward Medical College and initially having a separate department of neurology was not mandated in medical colleges by Pakistan Medical and Dental Council¹. Some neurology training programs do not give exposure to subspecialties and training is focused on adult neurology². From 2015 to 2016, several conferences were held on neurology including an Annual Meeting in Quetta, movement disorder conference in Lahore. A comprehensive stroke course which included 8 workshops trained 400 doctors. There were also more than 20 seminars on stroke, headache, epilepsy and dementia. Awareness of diseases in neurology was made by organizing public awareness days including International epilepsy day, Parkinson's Day, Multiple Sclerosis day, World Brain Day, Dementia Day, Rabies Day, Stroke Day and National disability day. To further engage the general public there were 8 press conferences, 20 media appearances, 6 newspaper articles and more than 1000 news items published. Billboards, posters and brochures were utilized as well. Additionally Pakistan Society of Neurology has a Facebook page and website. Guidelines for Pakistan have been published on Parkinson's disease and epilepsy in 2015. Neurology awareness and research foundation (NARF) has been registered as charity organization. This foundation provides Zakat for needy patients as well as travel grants and research grants. Moreover it has developed public awareness programs of dementia, epilepsy, pain and multiple sclerosis. There are videos available on YouTube, Dailymotion and CDs. This year more than 30 medical doctors passed FCPS neurology, amounting to a total of 200 neurologists in the country. Of a total of 40 neurology centers, 18 have been approved for FCPS training. Presently Aga Khan University offers a Clinical Neurophysiology and Electrodiagnostic Medicine fellowship and a one year Stroke fellowship. For undergraduate students, neurology rotation has been made mandatory and PSN has demanded there must be neurology faculty at PMDC recognized institutes. Research has been extensive in the past few years. Pakistan Research Medical Council (PMRC) grant has been submitted for neurological diseases in Pakistan where data from 40 centers will be collected and 100,000 patients will be enrolled over a period of 6 months. A planning commission grant will assess population based prevalence of neurologic diseases while a National Multiple Sclerosis registry will enroll 3000 MS patients throughout country online. The Pakistan Journal of Neurological Sciences is a good quality quarterly journal. Currently it is available on Web, E commons, HEC, PMDC and WHO-EMRO and plans to be on PubMed central by 2016. Moreover it is premier journal for neurosciences and we are working to include this journal as a CPSP approved journal for FCPS trainee's research papers. The downside is it is a specialty journal resulting in limited submissions especially from Psychiatry and Neurosurgery. Publication is delayed till 3 months with limited review articles. Another challenge is plagiarism and ethical integrity of manuscript. Furthermore, a public awareness magazine Jehan e Aesab is being published since January 2016. It aims to promote medical writing in Urdu, and is targeting media, faculty, lay people, patients and attendants. Content of this magazine aims to include interviews with patients and doctors, advances in health, new treatments, awareness monographs and patient experiences. For improvements in neurology in the future it is important to affiliate members from fields such as neurorehabilitation. Neuroscientists, trainee and student members must be included as well. Medications such as tissue plasminogen activators must be made available. It is essential to establish stroke units and rehabilitation centers in all Civil and District Health Quarters (DHQ). Public awareness is essential to remove misconceptions regarding neurological diseases. Another way forward is advocacy- changing rules and forming health policies which shall benefit neurological care.

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