Asian and Oceanian Congress of Neurology 2014: Intraregional and Interregional Synergy

Asia, the world’s largest continent, is located in the eastern and northern hemispheres and is home to approximately 4.2 billion people, 60% of the world’s population. Oceania comprises the island groups within the central Pacific and south Pacific oceans and has a total population of 35.7 million. The burden of neurologic disease in Asia and Oceania is high and there is a shortage of neurologists, neurology training programs, and public awareness initiatives.

To promote education and research, and the exchange and diffusion of information and ideas relating to the nervous system on an international scale, the Asian Oceanian Association of Neurology (AOAN) was established on June 26, 1961. One of its activities has been the organization of the Asian and Oceanian Congress of Neurology (AOCN) once every 4 years. The AOCN was first held in the Nippon Teshi Center on October 7–10, 1962, under the leadership of Professor Okinaka and Charles Poser of the World Federation of Neurology (WFN). Since then, various countries have hosted the AOCN. The 12th AOCN was held in New Delhi from October 22–26, 2008, along with the 16th Annual Congress of the Indian Academy of Neurology. The 13th AOCN was held in Melbourne from June 4 to June 8, 2012, along with the Australian and New Zealand Association of Neurologists. The academic content and the number of delegates, representing countries from the region, have improved over the years.1,2

The 14th AOCN took place in Macao, March 2–5, 2014. This congress was organized by the Hong Kong Neurological Society and was the first biennial conference. It was spearheaded by the experienced Dr. Ping-Wing Ng, Dr. Ka Sing Lawrence Wong, and Dr. Leonard Sheung-Wai Li, and was attended by renowned national and international faculty and delegates. It provided a valuable opportunity to learn innovative advances in core neurology as well as allied subspecialties. Scientific Program Committee co-chair Dr. Ka Sing Lawrence Wong and Honorary AOAN President, Dr. Raad Shakir, President of the WFN, who gave an overview of how the WFN serves as a link among national societies, their regional associations, and the rest of the world to foster quality neurologic services and training globally.

The AOCN 2014 espoused an intraregional (within the Asia-Oceanian region) and interregional synergy to promote the advancement of neurologic awareness and education in Asia and the Oceania.
The various symposia were organized through the collaboration and cooperation of various local and regional specialty societies (table). One of the attention-grabbing topics was "Past, Present and the Way Forward for Developing Organization in the Asian and Oceanian Region, like the Indian Academy of Neurology." The President of the AOAN highlighted the role of the Indian Academy of Neurology in the structural and organizational evolution of the field of neurology in developing countries like India. Dr. Raad Shakir also presented a symposium on "Neurology in the Developing World: WFN Perspective," urging the need to train general practitioners and paramedical staff in neurologic care, in order to help overcome the shortage of trained neurologists in developing countries.

To encourage young neurologists, 8 free paper presentation sessions were conducted, which provided a warm atmosphere and an interactive platform for exchange of experiences. A significant contribution was made by the grant-giving organization, Guangdong Yu Foundation, established on August 6, 2012, which primarily focuses on youth participation in public welfare activities. In 2013, the Yu Foundation donated HK $2 million to the Hong Kong Neurological Society for advancing the development of neurology. At AOCN 2014, HK $372,950 was given in scholarship and travel grants to support neurologists from low and middle income countries in attending this congress. Ten neurologists from China, 14 from India, 2 from Indonesia, 2 from Iran, 4 from the Philippines, and 1 from Sri Lanka received a scholarship; travel grants were awarded to neurologists from Georgia, India, Mongolia, Nepal, and Pakistan.

Thus AOCN 2014 witnessed the establishment of intraregional–interregional collaboration networks. A comprehensive scientific program was prepared and executed through the dynamic contribution of experts and close synchronization with regional societies. This effort has paved the path for future meetings and also allows a direct connection between the AOAN and the regional specialty societies for the growth and development of neurology in the Asian and Oceanian region. The 15th AOCN is scheduled to be held in 2016 in Malaysia and will surely be a
resounding success with further intraregional and interregional interaction and collaboration.

By utilizing its existing and potential capabilities, along with the continuing involvement of regional and subregional organizations in conducting workshops and symposia, the AOCN can reach unprecedented heights and lessen the burden of neurologic disorders.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS
Dr. Man Mohan Mehndiratta conceived and designed the manuscript and conducted data acquisition and critical review of the manuscript. Dr. Ryuji Kaji reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Ka Sing Lawrence Wong reviewed the manuscript. Dr. Natasha Singh Gulati redrafted the manuscript and conducted the database search.

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DISCLOSURE
M. Mehndiratta is President of the Asian and Oceanian Association of Neurology. R. Kaji is Chair of the Asia Initiative, WFN. K. Wong, P. Ng, and N. Gulati report no disclosures relevant to the manuscript. Go to Neurology.org for full disclosures.

REFERENCES
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