

Canadian Neurosurgical Society Newsletter Fall, 2009

Canadian Neurological Sciences Federation, Halifax Congress, June 2009

This year's annual meeting featured an excellent scientific program for neurosurgeons, including the following special lecturers:

- Professor Cornelius Tulleken from Utrecht, The Netherlands, on his invention and use of laser assisted non-occlusive revascularization of the brain
- Dr. Mark Bernstein from Toronto, speaking about his novel and thought-provoking "qualitative research" on patient-surgeon interactions
- Dr. Ivar Mendez from Halifax, speaking on his group's remarkable work on brain repair for Parkinson's Disease, as well as his ward-rounding robot at the Halifax Infirmary (including a live internet-based remote-controlled demonstration!)
- Dr. Michael West from Winnipeg (Royal College Lecturer), speaking on his group's experience to date with Canada's first Gamma Knife unit at the Manitoba Health Sciences Center
- Dr. Gary Steinberg Professor and Chair at Stanford University, California (Penfield Lecturer), presenting on one of the world's largest and probably the most carefully studied series of patients with moyamoya disease (three of four of Gary's Canadian former fellows were in attendance).

Inclement east-coast weather kept attendees indoors for superb courses (spine, neurovascular, neuroendoscopy, peripheral nerve surgery and "whats new in neurosurgery") and platform sessions for scientific papers, which included the CNSS K.G. McKenzie Prize winners for 2009:

- Basic Science winner: Dr. Alim Mitha (University of Calgary):
"A novel tissue engineering approach using endothelial Progenitor cell-seeded biopolymer to treat intracranial saccular aneurysms"
- Clinical Science winner: Dr. Ratan Bhardwaj (University of Toronto):
"Unique functional pathway detected with MEG and DTI tractography in pediatric epilepsy"

Thanks to Dr. Zelma Kiss (University of Calgary) for presiding over the evaluation of a record number of prize submissions in 2009 (17 in total).

It was gratifying to see so many colleagues from across the country in Halifax for those few days in June, enjoying the program as well as the digital posters, exhibits, and particularly fine social events. Special thanks to Dr. Ian Fleetwood and his wife Kim for their extraordinary generosity in hosting a party at their house for

neurosurgeon attendees on the last day of the meeting. Thanks also to the just retired Scientific Program Committee Chair Dr. Mike Tymianski for his work on our behalf with the CNSF over the past few years—it was a great neurosurgical meeting to end with! Dr. Robert Loch Macdonald (Toronto) has taken over from Mike to sit on the CNSF Scientific Program Committee, as Vice Chair (SPC). Dr. Brian Wheelock (Moncton) has led the Professional Development Committee for the CNSF, working closely with the SPC, and he has now been replaced on that committee by Dr Ron Pokrupa (Kingston), as Vice Chair (PDC). Thanks to all of you for taking on these important positions on behalf of the CNSS.

Next year's meeting is in the lovely Quebec City, June 8 - 11, so put it on your calendar and I hope to see you there.

CNSS Annual General Meeting, Halifax, June 12

The minutes of the AGM are attached. Of special note:

- Secretary-Treasurer Dr. Brian Toyota informed the members present that CNSS Council has, like all other Societies of the CNSF, approved a small increase in annual dues primarily to support the Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences (an increase of \$30.00 for all but junior/resident members, whose dues remain unchanged at \$80.00 per year). The CNSS remains in sound financial condition.
- Dr. Charles Tator, University of Toronto, was nominated and unanimously voted to receive a CNSS Lifetime Achievement Award, to be given at the 2010 Congress in Quebec City. All of Charles' former residents and fellows are encouraged to attend this special ceremony to be held on conjunction with the Neurosurgical Plenary Session.
- Dr. Greg Hawryluk is stepping down after two years of excellent work as resident representative to the CNSS and CNSF, replaced by another University of Toronto resident, Dr. Shobhan Vachhrajani.

An anonymous, written, membership survey was carried out during the meeting, with the following interesting results:

- A best estimate is that there are 220 neurosurgeons active in Canada
- With the exception of several smaller cities and neurosurgical units in Regina, Moncton and St. John's, respondents from every other neurosurgical center in Canada felt strongly that more neurosurgeons are needed in their city or regions (possessing a variety of subspecialty skills), but NONE of these respondents felt there were sufficient resources (salary, hospital beds, OR time, office space, nursing) to accommodate additional neurosurgeons at the present time

- The majority of neurosurgeons in Canada are now on an “alternate reimbursement” plan or program (something other than “fee-for-service”) and the majority of neurosurgeons who responded felt that was either “good” or were “indifferent” to that situation.

Royal College Matters

Specialty Training Requirements (STRs)

Revisions to our STRs have now been completed by our Royal College Specialty Committee for Neurosurgery, chaired by Dr. Gary Redekop. One important amendment has been to increase the minimum training requirement in clinical neurosurgery from 36 to 42 months. It appears that many of our recent and current trainees in programs across the country have had or are planning at least 42 months of clinical neurosurgical training during their residency. Neurosurgical residency is considered widely to be *a minimum* of six years, with an understanding that some, if not many, residents will require seven years to reach all of their residency and training program objectives.

The majority of other changes in the STRs reflect the evolving practice and especially surgical and technical expectations in our always growing and advancing branch of surgery. A great deal of stimulating discussion and thought went into the new STRs, and when the final document is ratified and available, all members of the CNSS, and especially those involved in residency training, are encouraged to review it.

Graduates of Canadian Training Programs in Neurosurgery and Eligibility for the ABNS Examinations

While at present, graduates of Canadian training programs in neurosurgery are no longer eligible to take the American Board of Neurological Surgery (ABNS) examinations and become “board certified” in the United States (US), the CNSS remains determined to have the ABNS review this 1997 decision and possibly reverse it. Limited job opportunities in Canada, where hospital resources and now salaried positions are tightly regulated, is the number one concern of our residents as well as a significant consideration for medical students considering neurosurgery as a career. Access to American positions in neurosurgery is as important now as it ever has been.

Despite the ABNS ruling it does remain possible for Canadian-trained neurosurgeons to obtain work in the US even when “board-ineligible”. It appears that institutions, universities and hospitals in the US are able to make their own

independent decisions on the acceptability of training and certification of specialists they consider for employment or hospital privileges. In early 2009 I polled Canadian training programs enquiring how many of their graduates in the past five years found permanent employment in the US, and from the 13 out of 14 programs that responded it appears that 17 Canadian program graduates are now in the US working as neurosurgeons. My own records indicate this is 17 out of 71 (24%) of our "Reference" graduates (i.e. Canadians who graduated from a Canadian medical school). Nevertheless, the certainty and portability of employment in the US remains a huge concern for our trainees. They want to be able to take and pass the ABNS examinations!

Although several recent manpower assessments and predictions prepared by CNSS past-president (current CNSF vice-president) Dr. Derek Fewer clearly indicate that we are training more neurosurgeons than can be absorbed by our current national health-care system (and indeed we always have), there is no sign that our training programs have responded by reducing residency positions. Our neurosurgical services depend heavily on residents.

The CNSS is presently working with the RCPSC on strategies how to best appeal and reverse the ABNS decision. I have been in contact with the newly appointed Director of the Office of Education for the RCPSC, Dr. Ken Harris, on this matter. We hope to be able to make a formal appeal in early 2010.

Royal College Examinations in Neurosurgery

In 2010 Dr. John Hurlbert (University of Calgary) will take over as Chair of the Examination Committee for Neurosurgery. During my eleven years with the exam committee the examination process has been extensively changed and refined (with great help from the Royal College's Education Research and Development Unit), and as a result much has become more consistent, comprehensive and fair. Members of the CNSS and Fellows of the Royal College should know what a superb exam committee they have working on their behalf:

- Geneviève Milot, Québec (Vice Chair)
- Simon Walling, Halifax
- Jeffrey Atkinson, Montréal
- Jeffery Alan Hall, Montréal
- Alain Bilocq, Trois Rivières
- Jacques Demers, Greenfield Park
- Kesava Reddy, Hamilton
- Christopher Wallace, Toronto
- Benoît Goulet, Montreal

- Eric Massicotte, Toronto
- David Ramsay, London
- David Steven, London (Neuropathology)
- Richard Moulton, Ottawa
- Patrick McDonald, Winnipeg
- John Hurlbert, Calgary
- Gary Goplen, Kelowna

An exit poll of our 25 examinees in 2009 had 23 responders; of which 13 had secured fellowship positions in Canada and 6 in the US (others were already in practice in either the US or another foreign country). Five candidates thought they had a future position in Canada after their fellowship, 4 thought they had a job waiting in the US after fellowship, 4 indicated they had positions in Saudi Arabia, and 6 (26%) had no future job prospects at that time.

CNSS and You

I encourage you all once again to participate in our annual Congress, a great forum to present papers and posters, participate in courses, see what your colleagues are thinking and doing, and socialize with your residents and peers from across the country. We are working hard to ensure that the meeting is pertinent to you and meets your educational needs. Don't forget you get valuable MOC points for your attendance.

As well, consider the Canadian Journal of Neurological Sciences for your clinical and scientific papers. As Associate Editor, I can assure you they will be welcome and receive a fair and expedited review.

We are at work on a "wait-times" statement from the CNSS which I would like to publish in our journal, and if any of you are interested in reviewing and helping craft the draft document please be in touch with me directly at maxfindlay@shaw.ca. If there is any other Canadian neurosurgical matter that you would like to discuss or share your views on, don't hesitate to send me an email.