

Organizational Update Asia Pacific Stroke Organization

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Stroke Burden in Asia

The burden of stroke on individuals, families, healthcare systems, and societies in Asia is enormous and increasing in relation to rapid sociodemographic and lifestyle changes in a large and diverse range of populations. However, challenges also present opportunities for experts from within and outside Asia to facilitate improvements in population health through advocacy, engagement, training, and the conduct and promotion of evidence-based strategies. With a total population that exceeds 4 billion, over half of the world's population, increasing numbers of patients are accessing clinical services, technologies, and databases, and clinicians are gaining training, experience, and reliable information on a broad range of aspects of stroke care. Clinical research experience is improving through international links and fellowships, and health professionals from the region are eager to engage (and prove themselves) through participation in high-quality research and clinical practice.

Vision and Mission

The Asia Pacific Stroke Organization (APSO) covers a vast and heterogenous geographical area, with much variability in language, governments, culture, historical links, socio-economic development, and organization of health services. APSO seeks to improve the standard of stroke care in the whole region by improving communication and cooperation between stroke professionals and organizations in the region and peers in other regions, by means of annual congresses, workshops, and continued medical education. In the past year, we have achieved this through strengthened cooperation with other organizations such as the European Stroke Organization and the Asia-Oceanian Society for Neurorehabilitation and increased participation by nurses and other health professionals and had active consultation

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with nongovernmental organizations with shared commitments to those affected by stroke.

Evolution of APSO

APSO originated from an amalgamation of the Asian Stroke Forum and Asia Pacific Conference Against Stroke. Before September 2009, these organizations held large annual conferences, independently: Asian Stroke Forum, primarily based in Japan, had conferences in Tokyo and Kyoto, in 2005 and 2007, respectively; whereas Asia Pacific Conference Against Stroke held congresses in Hong Kong, Thailand, China, India, Philippines, and Australia from 2004 to 2009. Dr Chen-Ya Huang formally registered APSO in Hong Kong in 2009, and Dr Yukito Shinohara, Japan, is credited with establishing Asian Stroke Forum. The merger of these 2 organizations in Cairns, Australia, used the synergies of 2 regional associations to promote and coordinate the exchange and dissemination of the scientific knowledge, research, and expertise in the field of stroke. The first conference was held within the World Stroke Organization Congress in Korea in 2010, and annual conferences have continued to provide much-needed continuing medical education in stroke.

Asia Pacific Stroke Conference 2016

The Asia Pacific Stroke Conference (APSC) 2016 was a great success in all aspects with >900 delegates attending from 30 countries for a joint conference with the Stroke Society of Australasia over 3 days in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. The workshops and symposia covered endovascular thrombectomy, intravenous thrombolysis, novel anticoagulants, and vascular cognitive impairment. Telestroke and the cost-effectiveness of hyperacute stroke treatment were reappraised, and the role of stroke nurses was once again emphasized in both plenary and poster sessions. The important role of patient groups have been recognized through sessions in the previous APSC conferences in Kuala Lumpur (2015), Taipei (2014), and Hong Kong (2013), and original science presentations have continued to grow in these conferences.

Executive Committee and Organizational Structure

APSO is a registered charity in Hong Kong. True to its international nature, the banking and secretariat service is based in Hong Kong, whereas the website is registered in India. The Executive Committee (EC), which is elected every 2 years, comprises the President, President-Elect, Immediate Past-President, Secretary General, Treasurer, and Chair of Continuing of Medical Education (CME). The EC is assisted

by a secretariat comprising a part-time staff, who manages the day-to-day affairs, as directed by the EC. The Executive Council includes the EC and representatives from member societies. The EC and Council meet annually during the APSC, with ad hoc informal discussions held when EC members are present at regional meetings. Additional formal EC meetings were held in Hong Kong in 2016 and 2017, in-between APSCs, to discuss and resolve urgent matters that could not be adequately addressed by e-mail. These proved essential for efficiencies in obtaining consensus on strategy, events, and, most importantly, the fundamental mission of APSO among EC members.

Members of the EC have long recognized the different needs of stroke care in the region and acknowledge the urgency in addressing the challenges of communication (our members inside and stroke-related societies outside) for APSO. The secretary has, therefore, made changes to the APSO website contents and its capabilities (<http://www.theapso.com/home>). The plan is to enrich the website contents with activities of stroke-supporting organizations and their CME programs.

Membership

Five new members joined the organization in this year, so there are now 17 society members including 5 sponsoring (Stroke Society of Australasia, Hong Kong Stroke Society, Japan Stroke Society, Korean Stroke Society, and Taiwan Stroke Society) and 12 affiliated societies (Bangladesh Stroke Society, Indian Stroke Association, Stroke Section of Jiangsu Neurology Association, Malaysian Society of Neurosciences, Mongolia Stroke Association, Nepal Stroke Organization, Pakistan Stroke Society, Philippine Neurological Association, Singapore National Stroke Association, National Stroke Association of Sri Lanka, Thai Stroke Society, and Vietnam Stroke Society).

Continuing Medical Education

The CME support program is focused on coordinating and extending specific educational activities within the broader objectives of advancing knowledge, skills, and best practice in all aspects of stroke and related cerebrovascular diseases. These activities complement the annual flagship APSCs, which have been the main event of scientific exchange for the APSO.

One of the earliest initiatives was the creation of a repository of expert speakers identified by stroke societies that are members of the APSO. This repository facilitates the organization of scientific meetings in the region. A further initiative was the establishment of an annual allocation of funds for CME activities, which include APSO-funded outreach programs of visiting professorships to conduct workshops and participate in specific national conferences. Priority is given to assist low-resource countries in stroke education. The first of such activity was organized in Dhaka, Bangladesh, as part of International Neurology Seminar in November 2016. Future educational activities are scheduled for Mongolia; others are in discussion.

APSO also recognizes the difficulties in attending international conferences for junior members from low- and low- to middle-income countries. To alleviate this problem, several

travel grants have been established for young neurologists and allied health personnel and nurses to attend APSCs. The next APSC is in the historical city of Nanjing, China, from 26 to 28 October 2017 (<http://apsc2017.org>), where the role of stroke nurses in educational and scientific parts will be enhanced as part of the routine programs for physicians. APSC 2018 will be held in Indonesia.

Collaborations

Collaboration with other international organizations is crucial to increase the visibility for our young organization. To date, joint symposiums in major scientific meetings have been organized with the World Stroke Organization, European Stroke Organization, and Asia Oceanian Society for Neurorehabilitation. The first of these sessions were held at the World Stroke Organization Congress in Hyderabad, India, in October 2016, and in the European Stroke Organization Conference in Prague, Czech Republic, in May 2017. Further collaborations will be held during the second Asia Oceanian Congress for Neurorehabilitation in Tagaytay City, Philippines, in August 2017.

Funding

The main source of income for APSO is from the APSCs. Contributions come from surplus income from APSCs, as well as registration fees. The other smaller income source is the annual subscription fees paid by members: highest from sponsoring societies, lower from affiliated societies, and least by individual memberships. The funds generated are held in current and savings accounts in the Chartered Bank, Hong Kong, in Hong Kong. Signatures of 2 EC members are mandatory before any expense is allowed. The accounts are audited by a certified professional accounting firm and has to be submitted to the government of Hong Kong.

Challenges

The humongous task for APSO is to develop stroke protocols for universal delivery of stroke care. Much of the Asia-Pacific region is undergoing economic transition, with increasing stroke burden in the near future. At the same time, there is a gross inadequacy in terms of manpower, facility, and infrastructure. There is still a serious shortage of evidence that is based on local data on the options for stroke care. Basic training and CME opportunities, however, require financial support often lacking in the less economically advanced regions. How to reach out to such regions will require fresh innovative approaches. The feasibility of an outreach program, stroke care without borders, using volunteers as trainers, is currently being studied.

Way Forward

Over the years APSO has established itself as a successful organization and has conducted many annual conferences which were educational, enjoyable, and successful in every respect. In future, it will be important to adapt and continue to improve. The APSO EC and Council continue to work with integrity to coordination with the many different countries that provide unparalleled services to conduct more such successful events. APSO further

plans to enhance its membership to other Asian Oceanian countries, honoring past presidents, and to upload information about the country representatives/national delegates of APSO on the website to enhance visibility and connectivity. CME programs will be further enhanced to improve stroke care in the region.

Conclusions

APSO has had a busy year, with a growing membership; successful APSCs; funding of visiting professorships; collaborations with the World Stroke Organization, European

Stroke Organization, and Asia-Oceanian Society for Neurorehabilitation; and revision of the website. We will continue to grow and collaborate in our mission to combat stroke in the Asia-Pacific.

Disclosures

None.

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