

# World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies Global Relations Committee

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## Introduction

The World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies (WFNS) has assembled an all-star cast of neurosurgeons interested in Global Neurosurgery. I am honored to serve as External Relations Lead. Listed below are a few examples of projects that the group is working on that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based. The External Relations team is eager to synergies with other teams moving forward.

## Initiatives

### *Standardizing Education*

Both the WFNS and International Society for Pediatric Neurosurgery (ISPN) have Education Committees who produce educational courses either virtually or in-person in low- and middle-income countries several times per year. I have spoken to the President of the WFNS, Nelson Oyesiku, and the Chair of Chairs, Kenan Arnautovic, to suggest that we consolidate these committees rather than having two parallel processes performing the same task. The ISPN should serve as the Pediatric Neurosurgery Education Committee for the WFNS from now onwards. Typically, in the in the past, the Committee chairs have been ISPN members. Drs. Oyesiku and Arnautovic voiced agreement to that arrangement. Since the ISPN is already an international society with 530 members from around the globe, this should be acceptable without necessitating that the ISPN “joins” the WFNS. The agreement was that money from any educational course that produced a financial profit would be divided equally between the WFNS and the ISPN. To date, the ISPN has underwritten the costs of plane tickets for the speakers at these meetings, although courses have all been virtual since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Local hosts have covered the costs of hotel, meals, and so on once the speakers are on location. However, to date, I am not aware that any of these courses has generated a financial profit. The marketing and presentations at teaching courses would be co-branded.

### *The Guide*

For the past decade the ISPN has maintained an online educational e-book called “The Guide,” which has over 60 chapters on pediatric neurosurgical topics in a Wiki format such that members can contribute and continually update chapters. This e-book was the brain-child of Dr. Ira “Rick” Abbott in New York, who has been the managing editor for the past decade. Dr. Abbott is now retiring, and we are looking for a new editor-in-chief. We have formed an ISPN Committee to help carry The Guide forward. Dr. Abbott and I have recently had a virtual meeting with Medtronic looking for financial support to advance The Guide to a higher level by hiring a part-time editor and web assistant, though this remains in progress. Interested readers can access The Guide through the ISPN Website ([www.ispneurosurgery.org](http://www.ispneurosurgery.org)).

### *Comprehensive Policy Recommendations for the Management of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus in LMICs*

Drs. Kee Park and Ben Warf from the Harvard Program in Global Surgery and Social Change led the creation of a booklet entitled “Comprehensive Policy Recommendations for the Management of Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus in LMICs” from the experts in the Comprehensive Policy Recommendations (CHYSPR) group (<https://www.chyspr.org/>). This booklet will be made available to the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Health Assembly (WHA) as a formal guide to prevention, management, and resource allocation for patients with this birth defect. Work on this compendium is linked to the next project.

### *Global Alliance for the Prevention of Spina Bifida F*

Many of our committee members have been involved with the Global Alliance for the Prevention of Spina Bifida F – folate-preventable spina bifida – (GAPSBi-F) group, a member group of the G4 Alliance. This group is working towards submitting a resolution to the World Health Assembly supporting global fortification of staple foods folic acid as a public health measure aimed at reducing the incidence of spina bifida and hydrocephalus around the world. This effort is mainly being championed by Drs. Gail Rousseau, Jeff Blount, Adrian Caceres, Vijaya Kancherla, Godfrey Oakley, Kee Park, and others. In addition to the G4 Alliance, GAPSBi-F (<https://www.theg4alliance.org/gapsbif>) has members from the ISPN, WFNS, and International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, among others. It has support from the G4 Alliance, ISPN, WFNS as well. The World Health Assembly opens May 24, 2020. Members are working on gaining support from Ministers of Health around the world to pass this resolution.

### *G4 Alliance*

The G4 Alliance (<https://www.theg4alliance.org/>) now has over 60 member societies who work together to increase and improve access to surgical, obstetric, trauma and anesthesia (SOTA) care world-wide. St Jude Global is one of its newest members, and we at St. Jude are excited to become involved. St Jude will be primarily represented by Dr. Hafeez Abdulhafeez, a pediatric surgeon on faculty at St Jude who is originally from Sudan and has a global interest in childhood cancer. I will attend the virtual G4 Alliance meetings when possible.

### *American Board of Neurological Surgery*

I recently presented at the winter meeting of the American Board of Neurological Surgery (ABNS) regarding a global vision for the ABNS in the future. As globalization advances, the training and certification of neurosurgeons around the world continues to become increasingly homogeneous. The length of training tends to be shorter (3-5 years) in LMICS where capacity building is essential. However, in high-income countries (HICs), the training format and length, as well as opportunities for sub-specialization, require 6-7 years and greater experience. Typical Board Certification in most continents involves passing both a written examination and an oral examination. The ABNS has served in a consultative role in the past when asked by other countries regarding neurosurgical training and certification issues. The ABNS also produces a number of educational products and examinations. Our discussion centered around potentially making some of these educational tools available online for free to neurosurgeons around the world in the future. The ABNS Board voiced support for a more global vision. We will provide a further update on this effort in the future.

#### *American Association of Neurological Surgeons*

The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) leadership, under President Regis Haid and President-Elect Ann Stroink, recently held its virtual Strategic Planning Meeting. The discussion centered around the desire for the AANS, as the continental society representing North America to the WFNS, to become more active in global neurosurgery. At present, 17% of the AANS membership is international, and its annual meeting includes a 2-day symposium on international neurosurgery. In meeting and speaking with their leadership, I learned that the AANS is working on developing educational opportunities worldwide. At present, the AANS owns "The Rhoton Collection," which is a free online educational tool based upon micro-neurosurgical anatomy, anatomical lectures, and surgical videos. It can be used for training and education, is linked to the AANS-affiliated Journal of Neurosurgery (JNS) family of publications, and is managed by Dr. Jeffrey Sorenson. Likewise, the JNS family of journals are highly cited and available online. Neurosurgical Focus is their monthly topic-centered open access online journal. Neurosurgical Focus Video and JNS Case Lessons are newer open access counterparts.

As you know, the WFNS President, Dr. Nelson Oyesiku, is interested in international outreach, training initiatives worldwide and has a global vision for the future of neurosurgery. His report on the homepage of the WFNS website of his "first 90 days in office" speaks to his ambitions for the WFNS. The AANS delegation to the Bogota meeting is organized, and most voting members plan to attend in person.

#### *St. Jude Global*

St Jude Global began formal efforts in 2017. Led by pediatric oncologist Carlos Rodriguez-Galindo, the program now has over 100 full-time employees, with formal relationships with over 60 centers around the world and plans to double the size of the program over the next five years. St. Jude Global has partnered with the WHO and passed a WHA resolution to target decreasing childhood cancer deaths by 50% by 2030. The approach is multifaceted. St. Jude has committed some \$200 million US to the WHO to collaborate with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to make chemotherapy available to pediatric centers in LMICs that treat children with cancer. There are 6 index childhood cancers, one of which is low grade glioma. The program has

developed online tools such as downloadable cancer registries, treatment protocols for various childhood cancers, and materials on the management of common complications and side-effects of current adjuvant therapies such as neutropenic sepsis. The program also has an online virtual course in pediatric oncology and neuro-oncology that allows oncologists around the world to develop expertise in caring for children with cancer. We are currently in the middle of this year's neuro-oncology course and have nearly 60 enrollees from 14 centers across the world participating in the curriculum. We also have a number of monthly online multidisciplinary brain tumor conferences with centers in China, Southeast Asia, Central and South America in which pediatric neuro-oncology cases are presented, imaging and pathology are reviewed, and management decisions are discussed. The St. Jude Global program also funds regional coordinators for partner sites who may help implement and manage registries and work with Ministers of Health within their assigned regions. These individuals work to increase capacity and coordinate Centers of Excellence for the care of children with cancer. The program also supports funding of fellowships, nurse specialists, and other trainees.

### *InterSurgeon*

InterSurgeon (<https://intersurgeon.org/>) is a free online tool devoted to facilitating global surgical collaborations. The brain-child of Drs. William Harkness and James Johnston, InterSurgeon was initially developed for pediatric neurosurgical partnerships but has expanded to the remainder of neurosurgery and other SOTA specialties as well. Individuals and organizations across the globe register and are matched to each other via a computer algorithm to form twinning partnerships, also known as "dyads". HIC-LMIC and LMIC-LMIC partnerships have been developed to scale up neurosurgical capacity, increase training, and augment research initiatives.

### *Foundation for International Education in Neurological Surgeons*

The Foundation for International Education in Neurological Surgery (FIENS) is one of the oldest and most accomplished groups in global neurosurgery. Led by Dr. Robert Dempsey at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, this group has a history of developing dyads in LMICs for the purpose of improving neurosurgical care in these regions. The group has been successful in developing relationships on virtually every continent. In addition to its Clack and Bassett Fellowships, which aim to train LMIC neurosurgeons, FIENS collaborates with Ministers of Health and governmental leaders to provide resources in resource-limited environments.

### **Conclusion**

As our committee moves forward, we will continue to look for areas in which global neurosurgery initiatives overlap and where opportunities for synergy can be recognized. I am excited by the energy and potential of the partners in this group to bring the world of neurosurgery closer together.