

HIGHLIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE MEETINGS

63rd American Academy of Neurology Annual Meeting Honolulu, 9-16 April 2011

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The 63rd American Academy of Neurology (AAN) Annual Meeting was held in the Hawaii Convention Center, Honolulu from 9-16 April 2011. This meeting continued to be a leading Neurology meeting with a huge attendance. More than 10,000 physicians and exhibitors attended this meeting and enjoyed the lovely and sunny Waikiki Beach. The meeting started with 3 days of workshops, courses, and other forms of education programs. This was followed by 3 days of scientific program, special sessions, and plenary sessions. The last 2 days were devoted to the education program.

A new form of scientific meeting known as integrated neuroscience sessions were organized for the first time. This activity started with one or 2 talks given by a key person in the field followed by a few platform presentations, and in the same avenue posters belonging to the subject of concern were presented. This provides friendly and focus interest group discussions. In addition, the usual fascinating Neuro Bowl was well attended. In this evening, 3 teams participated in 2 rounds of a questions and answers with audience participation. The team of senior neurologists won this event, they have been the winners for more than 10 years.

Many physicians from the Middle East and other neighboring countries attended and participated in this huge meeting. More than 20 papers from the Arab countries were presented, mainly from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Lebanon, and Syria. These presentations covered various neurological local experiences like Meningitis in Syria, Genetics of Multiple Sclerosis in Saudi Arabia, Quality of Life of MS patients in Lebanon, Description of a phenotype and genotype of certain genetics and metabolic disorders like Woodhouse Sakati Syndrome, Cerebellar Degeneration, and Motor Neuron Disorders.

During this meeting, all pertinent advances in the field of neurosciences were discussed and many invited speakers gave updated lectures in their area of interests.

The 2011 Plenary sessions started with the Presidential Session on 13 April 2011. The President of the AAN Robert C. Griggs, MD gave a summary of the academy's activities in the areas of major interests like stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, and muscle and nerve disorders. Particularly, he discussed the impact of the National Institutes of Health centre for the treatment of rare disorders. This is a network of excellence in the neurosciences field where data on patients will be centrally collected, scientific advances in these disorders will be collected, multi-center treatment, and diagnosis projects will be organized based on good practice guidelines with high standards of ethical monitoring and rapid projects performance with frequent teleneurology conferences. The plan is to include almost 7,000 rare disorders in these national projects.

Professor Daube from the Mayo Clinic gave the Houston H. Merritt lecture on "Spontaneous Activity in Electromyography" and he focused on the recent findings in fasciculation potentials and myotonic discharges. Dr. Stephen Hauser from the University of California, San Francisco gave the Robert Wartenberg lecture "Multiple Sclerosis: What's in Store for Our Patients?" He talked about the 3 new technologies, which will help people with multiple sclerosis. First is the powerful brain imaging technique that is capable of revealing in vivo the cellular

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and molecular pathology of MS. The second is the rapid progress in defining the genomic and epigenomic, and soon microbiome of MS. The third is the power and the speed of conducting modern clinical research both in treatment and epidemiological research as well as the change in the fundamental understanding, and the concepts of immunopathology. He stressed the need for closer collaboration across the global neurologic community, spanning academia, and the involvement of private sectors and industries in this field.

In the Hot Topic Plenary Sessions, Judy Van de Water, PhD from the University of California, talked about “Maternal Autoantibodies in Autism.” She talked about the presence of maternal anti-fetal brain IgG antibodies and autistic disorders. She concluded that we now have identified the antigens recognized by these autoantibodies; this will provide a potential diagnostic test as well as future therapeutic targets for autistic patients.

Then Tracy A. Glauser, MD from the Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Cincinnati, Ohio talked about “NIH Childhood Absence Epilepsy Trial: Clinical Outcomes, Underlying Science and Lessons Learned.” This is a double blind randomized clinical trial to compare the 3 most commonly used anti-epileptic medications (ethosuximide, lamotrigine, and valproic acid), to monitor the short-term and long term outcome for patients with childhood absence epilepsy. He explained the challenges and difficulties faced conducting these 32 center, 453 patient clinical trials.

The Pharmacogenomics of Clopidogrel Metabolism: Incorporating Emerging Science into Clinical Practice was discussed by Dr. Karen Furie from Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston indicating the need to establish the CYP2C19 genotype in patients with poor response to clopidogrel, and finding the genotype in these patients will help in management of stroke-prone patients.

On Wednesday, 13 April 2011 there were 6 talks presented during the contemporary clinical issues and case studies plenary sessions, including excess risk factors in African Americans, autopsy in Honolulu-Asia aging study, the effectiveness of amantadine hydrochloride in improving level of consciousness and functional recovery in patients in the vegetative or minimally conscious state after traumatic brain injury. In addition, the role of functional MRI in the differential diagnosis of dementia was presented.

At the end of the meeting, Stefan M. Pulst, MD, the chair of the scientific committee gave a talk about the scientific program highlights, where a summary of the key presentations and discoveries were presented. He then invited everybody to attend the 64th AAN Annual Meeting. The next academy meeting will be held in the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, on 21-28 April 2011.