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DEVELOPMENT OF NEUROLOGY IN PAKISTAN

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On the eve of the 20th Annual Neurology Conference we can look back over the last two decades to assess the development of Neurology in Pakistan. Neurology first functioned under the banner of Pakistan Academy of Neurological Sciences (PANS) and then as Pakistan Society of Neurology (PSN). The number of neurologists has increased from those that could be counted on the hands to a hundred and thirty six. I agree that this number includes many who do not have a major accreditation in Neurology i.e. hold a minor diploma but nevertheless their commitment to Neurological service and its improvement is not in question. The annual meetings of the society progressed from a half day meeting to two full day conferences. The Neurology Update meetings pioneered by our colleagues in Aga Khan University Hospital has become an Annual Neurological event that attracts our colleagues working outside Pakistan and the event has been taken up by other neurological centers of the country and rotates through them. The neurology society has branched into specialists societies as Pakistan Epilepsy Society, Pakistan Stroke Society, Pakistan Headache Society, which usually hold their meetings biannually.

The instruments available to us for investigating and treating neurological problems have also increased tremendously and all major centers are equipped with CT, MRI scans, Angiographic and Neurophysiological facilities. Acute Stroke Units have become a reality in a few centers. Neuropharmacology continues to flourish and Neurology comes out of from a diagnostic speciality and describing interesting cases to a speciality where we can offer much to our patients.

What is the future for us, 'the neurologist'. To state the obvious we are still very few in numbers. One hundred and thirty-five for a 180 million population. Even this does not give us a true picture as most of the 135 are clustered in 5-6 centers. Thus makes most of the populace without the benefit of our collective wisdom. We have to continue to strive to put at least one neurologist in every district of the country; and the neurology society has to play its role to influence the government to create a neurology post in every district hospital. The number of medical schools in the country has increased tremendously in the country both in public as well as private sector. Neurology training has to be in the undergraduate syllabus.

Infection including the infections of the nervous system continues to be a challenge more so in our part of the world with resistance to antibiotics becoming one of the most serious problems in modern medicine. With improving general medical care and longevity degenerative disorders especially dementia will become an increasing problem in the coming decades. The burden on the healthcare services and the family would be an increasing challenge and we hope that new insights in understanding Alzheimer's disease and the possibility of introduction of disease modifying agents for Alzheimer's disease would help us to address this coming epidemic. Epilepsy and care of patients with epilepsy takes most of our out-patient time. New pharmacological agents in our armory has helped our patients, but wide treatment gap and lack of facilities for surgical treatment of epilepsy still prevents us from providing a comprehensive program. Cerebrovascular disease including acute stroke is gradually being taken over by the neurologist from general medicine. The need for an acute stroke unit in every hospital must be one of our aims.

There are no large scale epidemiological data of neurological disorders in the country and I believe centers should pool together and address this issue which would be the first step to find out how big a problem we have and assess the disease burden to help us to advise health authorities to plan for the future.

The challenges are formidable but we have come a long way and need to be ready and plan for our next decades.