

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES OF THE CONGRESS OF NEUROLOGICAL SURGEONS: HISTORICAL VIGNETTES



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The 22 Founding Members of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons who convened in Saint Louis, Missouri in 1951, were all Americans, but their eyes were on the world. One of those Founders, fourth CNS President James R. Gay, remembers that, “The Founders avoided limiting words like American or National, or North American because we envisioned the society to be world-wide in scope”. I summarize herein a number of international activities and projects launched by the CNS over the years. These are but few historical vignettes, illustrating the broad international reach of CNS initiatives, paralleling the development of the new organization.

The Honored Guest Tradition

The first two Honored Guests of the CNS, at the critical second and third CNS Annual Meetings in 1952 and 1953 were Swedish (Herbert Olivecrona, Figure 1) and British (Sir Geoffrey Jefferson), respectively. Two of the three subsequent Honored Guests in 1954 and 1956 were Canadian, Kenneth McKenzie and Wilder Penfield, respectively. We have speculated that the absence of an Honored Guest at the first CNS meeting in Memphis in 1951 may have reflected a lukewarm support of senior American neurosurgeons for the budding organization. So the presence of acknowledged international stars as the first Honored Guests helped establish CNS pre-eminence despite this early ambivalence about the organization among senior American neurosurgical leaders. But it also helped promote the emerging organization in the international arena.



Figure 1. Herbert Olivecrona, of Sweden was the first CNS Honored Guest at the 1952 CNS Meeting in Chicago.

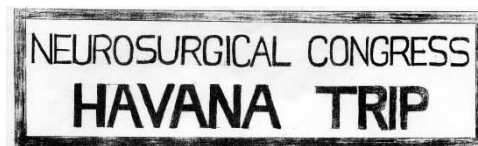


Figure 2. Newsletter announcement of the first international CNS post-meeting Symposium to be held in Havana after the New Orleans CNS Meeting in 1953.



Figure 3. “The international Gavel”, sponsored by the CNS, was presented on behalf of the five American National Societies to the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies at its first World Congress in Brussels, Belgium in 1957

Post-Meeting Symposia and Travel by CNS President

Early CNS post-meeting Symposia were purposely international, serving a dual purpose as a relaxing travel club after the formal CNS Annual Meeting, but also promoting connections with international neurosurgical societies on their home turfs. The first such meeting was in Havana (Figure 2), following the 1953 CNS Annual Meeting held in New Orleans, LA. In subsequent years, CNS Presidents often traveled during their presidency with the aim of seeding international program development. The first such initiative was well documented by CNS Founding Member and President Roy Tyrer, after the 1963 CNS Annual Meeting in Denver. He traveled to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and initiated lasting exchange programs with neurosurgeons in those developing countries. Many of those initiatives, nurtured by CNS Presidents and Executive Committee members over the years, seeded ongoing programs of the Foundation for International Neurosurgical Education (FIENS). Later travel exchange



Figure 4. The Author, as 51st CNS President (right), along with CNS Annual Meeting Chairman Douglas Kondziolka (left), were guests of the Japanese CNS at its meeting in Yamagata, Japan in May 2001.

traditions developed with the Japanese CNS (see next page), and in conjunction with joint meetings with the French, Italian, Indian neurosurgical societies, and others.

The CNS as a Founding Member of the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies

The CNS was one of the founding organizations that launched the World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies in 1955. James R. Gay has recounted participating along with several CNS Founding Members “in the naming of the new federation”. In 1957, the WFNS held its first formal meeting in conjunction with the International Congress of Neurological Sciences in Brussels, Belgium. The CNS sponsored and delegated Dr. Gay to help design The International Gavel (Figure 3), presented by the five American National Societies to the WFNS at the Belgium meeting.

Expanding on the first Directory of Neurological Surgeons in the United States, compiled by the CNS Survey Committee in 1957, the CNS embarked on publishing the first World Directory of Neurological Surgeons in 1967, including names and addresses of all

the world’s neurosurgeons. Edited by George Ablin, this landmark document was indexed by country and region, and also included a separate compendium of international neurosurgical societies, with names of their president or secretary, and mailing addresses. Subsequent editions of the World Directory have continued to be sponsored by the CNS to this day, and have facilitated countless links among colleagues across the globe over many decades.

The Japanese CNS

The best form of flattery is emulation. Professor Keiji Sano of Tokyo University, widely known as the father of Japanese Neurosurgery and Chairman of the Japanese Board of Neurosurgery (1966-1973 and 1979-1980), was so impressed with the CNS, that he led the founding of the Japanese CNS in 1980. The new organization would emulate the CNS culture, bylaws, primary commitment to volunteerism and education, and would mandate an organizing committee under the age of 50. Even the logo of the Japanese CNS featured a coronal profile of the cerebral ventricles in a butterfly scheme,



Figure 5. International attendees at the Annual CNS meeting in 2001, reflecting the CNS reach into world neurosurgery.

as its American counterpart. The President of the CNS was invited to the first meeting of the Japanese CNS in Tokyo in 1981. In turn, Keiji Sano (now Past-President of the Japanese CNS) was selected as CNS Honored Guest for the 1982 CNS Meeting, held in Toronto under the presidency of Donald H. Stewart, Jr. Since then, and through the present, CNS Presidents have been invited each year to attend the Japanese CNS meetings (Figure 4), and the Japanese CNS President is welcome as a special guest at each CNS meeting in the United States

From the CNS International Committee to the International Division

International initiatives of the CNS remained largely fragmented until the early 1990s when the CNS International Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Steven Giannotta, and later formalized as a Standing Committee. Under subsequent chairmanships of Awad, Oyesiku, and others, the CNS International Committee developed an international membership drive in the 1990s and early 2000s (Figure 5), formalized educational collaborations with sister neurosurgical societies, and created processes for interface with international development initiatives in conjunction with organizations such as ThinkFirst, FIENS and others. In more recent years, the CNS International Committee has morphed under the leadership of former Vice President Saleem Abdulrauf and Anil Nanda, as a veritable International Division with 1,270 international CNS members, a fitting fulfillment of the founding CNS vision to impact the world. ❏