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Global, Interdisciplinary, Integrative

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By Thomas H. Bak and Facundo Manes

The WFN Research Group on Aphasia, Dementia and Cognitive Disorders (RG ADCD) goes back to the Problem Commission on Aphasiology, founded in Varenna on Lago di Como in 1966, as one of the first “problem commissions” (as the research groups were initially called) of the WFN.

From early on, the group’s activities have been strongly influenced by two complementary developments. The first one is the continuous move toward a broader, interdisciplinary, collaborative and integrative approach. Early in its history, the group recognized the close connection between aphasia and other aspects of cognition.

Cognitive symptoms can occur in a wide range of neurological diseases, such as stroke, neoplasms, trauma, epilepsy or even migraine. Accordingly, our group has always been kept with other research groups. The most lasting and fruitful one has been the collaboration with Motor Diseases (RG MD). It has been given a strong impetus by recent advances in clinical sciences, such as the discovery of the C9ORF72 gene, which can cause both Motor Neuror Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD).

Within a few years, MND changed from a classical prototype of a purely motor disorder to a between movement and cognition. The collaboration between RG ADCD and RG MD kept We have organized joint symposia and teaching courses across the world and the official jo Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, has been renamed to Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis and Fro is now also endorsed by our group.

The second development, which has defined our activities in the last decades, is a move to



Attendees and particip

perspective. Originally, the biennial meetings of the group alternated between North America (Boston) and Europe (London). In the late 20th century, they expanded to encompass Central/Eastern Europe (Prague), South America (Buenos Aires) and Asia (Istanbul, Hyderabad) with the next meeting due to take place in Hong Kong.

This has led with time to an increasingly diverse, international membership as well as to a number of satellite meetings. Thanks to the Cognitive Clinics Worldwide grant from the WFN, our group has been able to offer courses in cognitive neurology in Hyderabad, Kolkata and Bangalore in India, as well as in Mexico and Cartagena.

We are in process of establishing local networks of expertise throughout the world as well as providing information about cognitive tests available in different countries and languages. This will provide a platform for practitioners wishing to establish cognitive clinics in their countries.

An important part of our strategy to be globally inclusive is to make sure that our meetings are accessible to everyone interested. This is particularly relevant for the young neurologists, who we welcome through the World Neurology Forum of Young Researchers (FYRE). At our last meeting in Hyderabad, the FYRE members were encouraged to interact with local families, a way of creating personal friendships as well as professional partnerships.

These activities belong to the very core of our mission. Our growing interaction with neurologists worldwide has made us increasingly aware of the importance of linguistic, cultural and social factors in the diagnosis and management of dementia and cognitive disorders. The same disease, such as FTD, can present differently in different cultures¹—an observation that has to be taken into account when developing universally applicable diagnostic criteria. Likewise, cognitive tests cannot be applied across the world without being properly translated. The challenge of a global approach to cognitive disorders also brings opportunities.

Studies extending beyond the Western world can avoid certain confounding variables and can provide new insights, as illustrated by recent research on the relationship between bilingualism and dementia². Our current research on such topics, raise the awareness and offer practical advice and help to researchers as well as clinicians. In the future, while consolidating our programs in Asia and Latin America, we will be able to extend our reach to encompass Africa.

The recent change in our name to the WFN Research Group on Aphasia, Dementia and Cognitive Disorders is the next, logical step in our group's continuous development. The change was suggested at our meeting in Vienna and approved by the WFN on Nov. 1, 2013.

The new name reflects changes, which have happened in the group gradually over the past few years. Our members focus their research on different types of dementia, in particular FTD^{1,3}, as well as Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia². Our biennial meetings as well as our teaching courses cover many dementia-related topics.

particular emphasis on cognitive assessment. Moreover, research on progressive aphasia, diagnostic criteria⁴ brought together aphasias and dementias, highlighting clinical as well as similarities between both disease groups.

We hope that the broader scope of our group will attract both scientists and clinicians from around the world in research on aphasia, dementia or any other cognitive disorder.

If you are interested in joining the group or attending our biennial meeting in December 2014, please contact thomas.bak@ed.ac.uk.

Bak and Manes are the chair and co-chair, respectively, of the WFN Research Group on Aphasia Disorders.

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