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The advocacy role of the World Federation of Neurology

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The WFN has the motto to foster brain health worldwide. This is an overarching theme and promotes neurology for the sake of patients with neurological disease worldwide. The recent GBD [1] has demonstrated the enormous share of neurologic disease in mortality, DALYS and Years lost. At the same time the joint WHO - WFN Atlas [2] demonstrates that huge treatment gaps can be identified for all aspects of health care worldwide.

Advocacy is defined as „giving a voice“ to patients and or creating awareness of issues. The term advocacy is not only used in medical, but also in social and other contexts. Advocacy can be a valuable instrument for patients, carers and lay-persons. In the face of the changing relation of patients and physicians in regard to autonomy, and partnership this momentum will increase.

Advocacy in neurology can be achieved by different methods and levels.

The WFN engages in the macro level, which is the successful engagement in the ICD 11, and non communicable diseases and in the WHO regional organizations.

Education at World Congress of Neurology (WCN) is not restricted to the scientific content, but to create awareness that advocacy is an important aspect of the activity of any neurologist. The aim of the Advocacy Palatucci Workshops [3] to acquire advocacy tools and resources is a regular feature of WCN.

Joint training courses in Africa jointly with the EAN [4] and AAN promote local neurology education. WFN promotes department visits from low income countries to Europe and Canada and also offers one year fellowships, or full training at the WFN Teaching centers in Africa [5] , the Americas and soon Asia to empower and promote local training and neurology.

The World Brain day (22 nd July) [6] is a WFN signature activity for awareness and advocacy. Previous themes have included stroke, brain health in aging population and epilepsy. The theme for 2018 will be „Clean air for brain health“ and will address the impact of pollution and environment on brain health.

Like ethics and humanities, advocacy needs to be an integral part of any curriculum. A large number of neurologists and trainees are still unaware of advocacy. There is a need of reading material, case studies and reports to understand its dimensions. We are preparing a first text book of Neurology advocacy (in press at OUP), an international journal of health advocacy and an online advocacy training course.

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