The Catalan Society of Neurology: an overview of its recent history (1973-2007)

A. Arboix¹, L. Soler², N. Fabregat³

¹ Cerebrovascular Disease Unit. Department of Neurology. Capio-Hospital Universitari del Sagrat Cor. Universitat de Barcelona. Barcelona, Spain.
Former President of the Catalan Society of Neurology (2010-2012).
² Department of Neurology. Capio-Hospital General de Catalunya. Sant Cugat del Vallés, Barcelona, Spain.

ABSTRACT

Introduction. This article analyses the activities of the Catalan Society of Neurology (Societat Catalana de Neurologia, SCN) during the 35-year period beginning in 1973.

Development. Our literature search draws from the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Catalan Society of Neurology and original historical sources found in the Library of the Academy of Medical Sciences of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, Barcelona (ACMCB in Catalan). The SCN was founded in 1973 by Dr A. Codina as a society that substituted the ACMCB Association of Neurological Sciences (1968-1973). That organisation in turn replaced the ACMCB Association of Psychiatry and Neurology (1941-1968), which was constituted after the Spanish Civil War to fill the gap left by the disappearance of the Catalan Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (1931/34-1939). The latter name ("more up-to-date", according to the first president, Dr Belarmino Rodríguez Arias, and in Catalan rather than Castilian) was given to what was originally the Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (1911-1931/34) during the Second Spanish Republic. We have divided the recent history of the SCN, the direct descendant of the original Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology, into three periods spanning approximately 10 years each. Throughout these 35 years, during which there have been 16 presidents, the Society prioritised continuing education in neurology, mainly through offering refresher courses and presenting clinical pathology cases.

Conclusions. The SCN’s contemporary period began in 1973 under the presidency of Dr A. Codina. The Society’s main educational activities during this time period included providing continuing education in neurology and presenting clinical pathology cases.

KEYWORDS

Catalan Society of Neurology, continuing education, history of the neurological sciences, history, neurology, teaching.

We present a review of the most recent, modern period in the history of the Catalan Society of Neurology (Societat Catalana de Neurologia, SCN): the 35 years between 1973 and 2007.

The SCN is the direct descendent of the first neurological society in Catalonia, the Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology, founded by Artur Galceran i Granés in 1911.¹² In the hundred years that have passed since then, the society has been renamed five times: Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology; Catalan Society of Neurology (Catalan Society of Neurologia, SCN); the 35 years between 1973 and 2007.

"La historia es una interrogación interpretativa de la naturaleza. Forma parte de la investigación misma: constituye su fase inicial’’

Santiago Ramón y Cajal (1852-1934).

"Only barbarians are not curious about where they come from, how they came to be where they are, where they appear to be going, whether they wish to go there, and if so, why, and if not, why not’’

Psychiatry and Neurology; Association of Psychiatry and Neurology; Association of the Neurological Sciences; and the Catalan Society of Neurology, which may be written in either Catalan or Castilian. Our Society’s modern or contemporary period began in 1973 with Dr Agustí Codina (Figure 1) as president.

Development

Our methodology consisted of viewing and analysing content from the different academic activities carried out by the Society by studying the minutes of SCN meetings, typically held monthly, during the time period in question. We have also examined original historical sources from the Academy of Medical Sciences of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, Barcelona (ACMCB in Catalan). Throughout our research we have noted down the contributions and focus of each of the Society’s presidents in order to highlight the SCN’s main academic, teaching, and social events during the 35-year period being examined.

1. Historical precedents

Few people are aware of the early neurological societies in Catalonia. The first, founded in 1911 by Dr Artur Galceran i Granés, was named Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (in Castilian, Sociedad de Psiquiatría y Neurología de Barcelona).1 In 1915, Dr Martí i Julià (1860-1917) succeeded him as president. In 1934, the society was renamed Catalan Society of Psychiatry and Neurology (in Catalan, Societat Catalana de Psiquiatria i Neurologia). Dr Belarmino Rodríguez Arias was its first president; the society was dissolved when the Spanish Civil War began.3-8 In 1941, the society was reinstated as the Neurology and Psychiatry Association (in Castilian) under Dr José Córdoba Rodríguez; in 1968, it became the Association of the Neurological Sciences with Dr Lluís Barraquer Bordas as its president.6 It was not until 1973 that it would adopt its fifth and current name: the Catalan Society of Neurology (Societat Catalana de Neurologia, in Catalan) (Figure 2). Its first president was Dr Agustí Codina Puiggros. Due to their proximity to France, the first Catalan neurological societies were influenced considerably by the French schools of neurology.9

2. The SCN’s three periods

The contemporary history of the Catalan Society of Neurology can be divided into three periods. First of all, we have its formative years (1973-1976), with Dr Agustí Codina Puiggros as president, plus the following ten-year period up to 1986 for a total of 14 years; secondly, the period from 1986 to 1996; and the most recent period, from 1996 to 2007.

During these 35 years, the SCN has had a total of 16 presidents (Table 1) and 71 of its members have served on its Board of Directors. In addition, and as of 2012, the SCN has also welcomed 15 Honorary Members (Table 2) and awarded 10 other members with the prize for excellence in their careers (Table 3). These titles and prizes are the foundation of the SCN’s prestige.
First period (1973-1986)


Two activities were successfully launched during this period: interdisciplinary meetings and clinical pathology sessions. These events were held in the ACMCB building in Paseo de la Bonanova, Barcelona.

The society established ties with the Catalan Regional Ministry of Health in order to defend our specialty. It also began the process of transforming *Revista de Neurología* into the SCN’s main journal for its publications, and was the first regional neurological society to accomplish that goal (Figure 3).

Table 3. Winners of the SCN Prize for excellence in their professional careers (1973-2012).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jaume Peres Serra</th>
<th>Josep Maria Grau Veciana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agustí Codina</td>
<td>Carlos Cervera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolf Pou</td>
<td>Miquel Balcells</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabel Ila</td>
<td>Feliu Titus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francesc Graus</td>
<td>Josep Lluís Martí-Vilalta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Second period (1986-1996)


During the 1986-1987 academic year, the SCN scholarship, which would later be known as the SCN-Fundación Uriach scholarship, was established for the purpose of promoting research projects in the field of neurology.

The society continued to hold its regular monthly activities of presenting topics in interdisciplinary continuing education (the first Thursday of every month) and clinical pathology cases (the third Thursday of every month).

Another important breakthrough in the defence of neurology was achieved thanks to the SCN’s insistence that the specialties of neurology and psychiatry be recognised as different parallel services by the Catalan Regional Ministry of Health. At the time, the Catalan public primary care system still used the term ‘neuropsychiatry’ to refer to both specialties indiscriminately. The society also advocated the creation of new hospital positions in neurology. During the 1986-1987 academic year, several important events took place:

- During the 1982-1983 academic year, Dr J.P. Mohr of New York visited to present a lecture on cerebral infarcts of unknown causes.
- The first regular sessions on neuromuscular disorders were organised during the 1985-1986 academic year.
- On 10 May 1986, members celebrated the 1st Conference of the Catalan Society of Neurology. The Director General of the Catalan Institute of Health, Dr. Xavier Trias i Vidal de Llobatera, served as its honorary president. The conference was also attended by prestigious speakers, including Prof. V. Caviness from the Department of Neurology at Massachusetts General Hospital (Massachusetts, USA) and Dr C. Dravet from Centre Hospitalier Saint-Paul (Marseille, France).
• The SCN participated in the 50th anniversary celebration of the Barcelona Neurological Institute.

• Celebration of the 5th Meeting of the Catalan Society of Electromyography (March 1987) with the participation of Prof. J. Kimura of the University of Iowa (Iowa, USA).

• Celebration of the 1st Refresher Seminar in Neurology in May 1987. The seminar covered neuro-ophthalmology, epilepsy, and neurological manifestations of AIDS. The seminar met with considerable success both that year and in those that followed; in fact, the SCN continues to organise that prestigious seminar on a yearly basis.

• The 6th Paediatric Neurology symposium held at Hospital Sant Joan de Déu in Barcelona.

• Preparation of the first "Proposal for the organisation of neurological care in Catalonia, 1987". The document was coordinated by Dr M. Aguilar, submitted to the Catalan Regional Ministry of Health, and published in Revista de Neurología.10

• The SCN was granted attendance and voting rights on the committees that award hospital positions to successful candidates in our specialty.

• First visits to Spain by Dr Julio H. García (Alabama, USA) and Dr Vladimir Hatchinski (Ontario, Canada). These two eminent figures presented lectures at the 2nd SCN Seminar, held from 29 to 30 April 1988 in Tarragona. One result of that scientific meeting was the publication of Avances y controversias en el diagnóstico y en el tratamiento de la patología vascular cerebral isquémica [Breakthroughs and controversies in the diagnosis and treatment of ischaemic cerebrovascular disease] (Figure 4).11 This monograph had a high impact factor, and Professor José Biller of the United States, who reviewed it for Archives of Neurology in 1991, stated “...any clinician who regularly takes care of patients with stroke will find this volume helpful and informative".12

• A commission was formed to draft the SCN Statutes, which were passed in 1989. The society was then listed in the Barcelona Register of Associations on 26 March 1990.

• The board formally approved Revista de Neurología as the journal in which the SCN would publish its clinical pathology sessions, lecture summaries, and other articles related to the society’s medical events.

• The society organised an extraordinary session titled “Motor neuron diseases: spinal amyotrophies and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis” from 19 to 20 March 1988 with the participation of Professor T.L. Munsat, Boston (Massachusetts, USA). Another significant event was the lecture given by Professor J. Aicardi on 22 March 1988, “Clinical heterogeneity of gangliosidosis”.

• The 3rd SCN Seminar, held from 11 to 12 May 1990 in Platja d’Aro, Girona province, and addressing the topic of "Breakthroughs in epilepsy" was attended by M. Baldy Moulinier (Montpellier, France), C. Munari (Paris, France), and J.M. Saint-Hilaire (Montreal, Canada).

• The SCN’s Neurosonology Symposium took place on 9 November 1989. Participants included Professor P. Arbeille (Tours, France) and Dr. V. Demarin (Zagreb, Croatia).

• In 1990 the SCN updated the conditions of its yearly scholarship by changing its name to the SCN-Fundació Uriach scholarship and increasing its amount to 1 000 000 pesetas.

• The SCN began presenting post-graduate courses in cooperation with Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.
• A joint session of the SCN, held in Hospital Clinic on 24 January 1991, addressed the treatment of focal dystonias with botulinum toxin. Professor M. Brinn of Columbia University (New York, USA), participated in the session.

• The decision was made to hold the 4th SCN Seminar (1992) in Andorra. The 1st Congress of the SCN, which focused on the clinical aspects of neurovirology, was also held that year. Dr Richard Price of the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis, USA) attended as a distinguished speaker.

• The 7th Neurology Refresher Seminar, held from 21 to 23 April 1993, addressed the topics of sleep disorders, multiple sclerosis, and movement disorders. Professor A. Thompson of Queen Square Hospital (London, UK) attended as a distinguished speaker.

• The 2nd Congress of the SCN was organised as a joint meeting with the Balearic Society of Neurology and held in Ibiza from 21 to 23 September, 1995.

Third period (1996-2007)


Butlletí, created as a newsletter to inform members of the events and activities organised by the SCN, first appeared in 1996. The society edited 14 printed issues of Butlletí, the last of which appeared in 2000 as a special issue reporting on the publication of the SNC’s treatment guidelines for epilepsy (Guía terapéutica sobre el tratamiento de las epilepsias).

The society continued to hold successful clinical pathology sessions, monthly interdisciplinary lectures, and the refresher seminar in neurology, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1996.

In 1997 with Dr Jaume Coll as president, the SCN launched its website. A year later, maintaining the website was declared one of the society’s priority activities.

The same year, the SCN reached an agreement with César Viguera, the editor of Revista de Neurología, in order to publish summaries of presentations given in the SCN annual meeting in that journal.

The Foundation of the SCN was also created in 1997.

The society’s first expert committee on cerebrovascular diseases, coordinated by Dr Josep Lluís Martí-Vilalta, met in Hospital de Sant Pau on 10 October 1997. These meetings, which rotate between different locations and are held monthly, continue to this day. Seven Catalan hospitals participated in the initial meeting: Sant Pau, Sagrat Cor, Hospital General de Catalunya, Vall d’Hebron, Clinic, Josep Trueta, and Hospital del Mar (Figure 5).

The Society rented an office for the SCN Foundation at Sicilia 236 bis 1-3 in Barcelona in 1998. Eduard Rius i Pey, the Regional Minister of Health, inaugurated the Foundation’s office in a ceremony held on 17 February 1999 (Figure 6).

The SCN’s first series of treatment guidelines appeared in 1999; they were endorsed by the Regional Government’s division of pharmaceutical care and complementary benefits. These treatment guidelines covered the following four neurological diseases: epilepsy, cerebrovascular diseases, Parkinson’s disease, and dementia.
The Catalan Society of Neurophysiology sued the Catalan Regional Ministry of Health in 1998 based on their allegation that neurophysiologists are the only specialists trained to carry out neurophysiological tests. In an extraordinary meeting held in May 1998, the SCN drafted a statement affirming that neurologists, like cardiologists, may also be qualified to perform complementary examinations. In this process, the Society was advised by Dr Isabel Illa and Dr Joan Santamaria, both expert clinical neurologists internationally recognised for their knowledge of electromyography and polysomnography, respectively. This document was then sent to health authorities and to the directors and administrators of different hospitals in Catalonia and published in the ACMCB’s Butlletí.

The SCN website gradually became a frequently-used resource; in 2001, it was visited by some 14 000 people monthly, and as a result, a total of more than 100 000 entries were added to the website.

Other important milestones during this time were as follows:

- The SCN confirmed its capacity to endorse desirable scientific and teaching activities requesting support.
- In 2002, the company Suport Serveis S.L. took charge of the SCN’s administrative office, which was moved from its registered address in calle Sicilia.
- For the first time, the best two presentations given at the SCN’s annual meeting were awarded prizes (grand prize and an honourable mention).
- The SCN congratulated Dr Lluís Barraquer Bordas on being awarded a doctor honoris causa by Universitat Rovira Virgili, Reus, Spain.
- Professor J. Kimura, president of the World Federation of Neurology, presented a lecture at the 8th Meeting of the SCN in Andorra on 26 March 2004. He was named an honorary member of the society.
- Representatives of the SCN were invited to participate on the boards awarding public hospital placements to successful candidates in the field of neurology.
- In 2004, new regulations for the code of ethics and best practices in the pharmaceutical industry became effective. These changes, concretely two new regulations affecting all medical societies, had an impact on how medical meetings and conferences are organised. Since that time, a) SCN members have not been allowed to bring guests to conferences and b) the SCN may not organise or finance any ‘recreational activities’ during the scientific conference itself.
- In 2004, the Spanish Society of Neurology under Dr J. Matías-Guiu organised a meeting for presidents of regional neurology societies. This resulted in the creation of the Spanish Federation of Regional Neurology Societies, a body coordinated by the president of the SEN. Dr J. Coll submitted the SCN’s proposal, which was successful, and beginning in 2005, the society was a member of the federation named above.
- As mentioned before, the SCN’s annual meeting rotates from city to city in Catalonia in order to promote neurology in areas in which the specialty may not be as well-developed. With this in mind, the annual meeting was held in Lloret de Mar (Girona province) in 2005; in Vandellòs (Tarragona province) in 2006; and in Lleida (Lleida province) in 2007. Holding annual meetings in different locations is one of the key activities characterising this period in the SCN’s development.
- The year 2006 saw the creation of a new electronic newsletter, named Neurologia Catalana and edited by Dr A. Gironell, which is still distributed today. The newsletter contains a section called El rincón del residente (the resident’s corner) that maintains the tradition of presenting and discussing clinical pathology cases, this time in written format, among neurological residents studying at different university hospitals in Catalonia.
- In 2006, the IT department at ACMCB took over the management of the SCN’s webpage. Its new address is www.scn.cat.
Conclusions

The SCN’s contemporary period began in 1973 with Dr A. Codina serving as president. Since then, offering continuing education in neurology and presenting clinical pathology cases have been the society’s most frequent, highly valued, and typical teaching activities. In its years between 1976 and 2007, the SCN has evolved to become a modern, competitive, and flexible neurological society that provides its members with a forum in which to teach and receive continuing education.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Maria José Sánchez, the librarian at Capio-Hospital Universitari del Sagrat Cor, Barcelona, for her invaluable assistance with our search for texts and images.

References