

The founding of the Spanish Society of Neurology (1949) in its international context

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. With the advances in neuroanatomy and the development of clinical neurology in the second half of the 19th century, neurologists began to form associations to distance themselves from psychiatry and internal medicine. This movement resulted in the founding of independent neurological societies in Europe and the USA. Early neurological societies in Spain were linked to the field of psychiatry. It was not until 1949 that an association dedicated exclusively to clinical neurology would appear: the Spanish Society of Neurology, or SEN.

Material and Methods. We present a review of historical medical literature and a study of the collections kept in the Spanish Society of Neurology's historical archive (AHSEN): the Luis Barraquer Ferré/Luis Barraquer Bordas collection (1923-1951); the Antonio and Manuel Subirana collection (1929-1990); the Spanish Society of Neurology collection (1949-1979); and the José María Espadaler Medina collection (1953-1968).

Results. We analyse the international neurology scene and review sections of the SEN's statutes and bylaws referring to international cooperation. The SEN's attendance of international neurology conferences is also examined.

Discussion. The founding of the SEN was a key moment in the history of neurology in Spain, and the Society employed two lines of action to develop the specialty. The first focused on obtaining representation for the discipline of clinical neurology in hospitals and universities. The second uses the SEN's corporate role as the Spanish exponent of the study of neurology in order to promote and transmit its scientific findings to relevant neurological forums, whether national or international.

KEYWORDS

Spanish Society of Neurology, medical societies, history of neurology, international neurology conferences

Introduction

Advances in neuroanatomy and clinical neurology in the second half of the 19th century led to the formation of professional associations in Europe and the USA that distanced themselves from psychiatry and internal medicine. These associations, which would come to be dedicated exclusively to neurology, included the American Neurological Association (1875),¹ the Neurological Society of London (1886),² Société de Neurologie de Paris (1899, renamed Société Française de Neurologie in 1949),³ Gesellschaft Deutscher Nervenärzte (1907),⁴ Società Italiana di Neurologia (1907, after separating from Società Freniatrica Italiana, founded in 1873),⁵ and the Swiss Neurological Society (1908).⁶

The establishment of these societies to represent the specialty can be understood as part of the process by which clinical neurology diverged from psychiatry and internal medicine. Societies arose out of forums in which professionals with similar concerns would participate and make decisions regarding matters of common interest. As a result, associations in the neurological community served to develop the specialty further and provide representation for the interests and scientific advances of neurologists in Spain.

The first Spanish neurological societies were initially linked to the field of psychiatry. When it was founded in 1911, the Barcelona Society of Psychiatry and Neurology was presided over by Dr Arturo Galcerán, a fervent

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scholar of neurology. In 1934, the society changed its name to the Catalan Society of Psychiatry and Neurology, writing it in Catalan. Its first president was Dr Rodríguez Arias. After the Spanish Civil War, it would resume its activities in 1941 as the Neurology and Psychiatry Association, written in Castilian.^{7,9} Despite listing two disciplines in its new name, the society's undisputed focus was psychiatry. Its early members did not include Barraquer Roviralta, Celestino Vilamura, Buentaventura Clotet, or any other prestigious clinical neurologists.¹⁰ The Spanish Association of Neuropsychiatrists was founded in 1924,^{8,11} and Barraquer Ferrer, Rodríguez Arias, and Gispert all joined in 1930. The society would later adopt the name of the Catalan Society of Psychiatry and Neurology. The Barcelona Society of Oto-Neuro-Ophthalmology was formed in 1932.¹² It was not until 1949 that clinical neurology would break its ties with other specialties by founding the Spanish Society of Neurology (SEN). Despite its name, however, the society's members included psychiatrists and neurosurgeons as well as neurologists.

In 1968, the Neurology and Psychiatry Association was renamed the Association of the Neurological Sciences; Dr Barraquer Bordas was its first president. In 1973, the society received yet another name, becoming the Catalan Society of Neurology, with Dr Agustí Codina as its president.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the founding of the SEN in the context of international events in the field of neurology. We will analyse the SEN's role in Spanish clinical neurology from the perspectives of the medical specialty and its efforts in international outreach.

Material and methods

We reviewed historical medical literature and searched the collections kept in AHSEN, the SEN's historical archive. Collections: *a*) Luis Barraquer Ferré and Luis Barraquer Bordas collection (1923-1951). Personal files generated as the result of Barraquer Ferré's activity on the SEN's Provisional Steering Committee. *b*) Antonio and Manuel Subirana collection (1929-1990). Personal and institutional file generated by Antonio Subirana's activity as a president and founding member of the SEN. *c*) Sociedad Española de Neurología collection (1949-1979). Documents generated by the SEN's activities as of its incorporation on 18 April 1949. *d*) José María Espadaler Medina collection (1953-1968), reflecting the doctor's

activities as Secretary of the Board of Directors of the SEN between 1953 and 1968 and as the SEN delegate to the World Federation of Neurology.

Results

1. The international neurological scene

In 1949 when the SEN was founded, Walter Rudolf Hess and António Egas Moniz were awarded the Nobel Prize for their breakthroughs in neurology. Dr Hess (1881-1973) was the director of the physiology department at the University of Zurich. He studied the nervous system by implanting brain electrodes in cats, unlike British scientists who generally used cell preparations to study the biochemical transmission of nerve impulses. In his experiments on electrical stimulation and coagulation in different locations in the thalamus and brainstem, Hess studied the function of autonomic centres regulating circulation, respiration, thirst, hunger, and sleep. Dr Egas Moniz of Portugal (1874-1955) received his neurological training in France under Babinski, Dejerine, and Pierre Marie. In 1927, after having completed several animal studies, he performed the first angiography on a human subject. In 1931, he published his book on diagnosing brain tumours using angiography, and his treatise on how to use the same techniques to study cerebrovascular accidents came out in 1937. He first indicated frontal leucotomy for a psychotic patient in 1935, and published his experience with 100 such cases in 1949 in *Archives für Psychiatrie* under the title 'Die Prefrontale Leukotomie'.¹³

Neurology was making great strides in Europe. In France, André-Thomas published his monograph on the physiology of balance in 1940 and another study on muscle tone in 1948. The clinical studies by Guillain and Barré, published in 1916, led to the coining of the eponymous syndrome when Baker published his review of 33 cases in *The Lancet* in 1943. With the help of his students Hécaen and Ajuriaguerra, Jean Lhermitte undertook studies that constituted first steps in neuropsychology. His most important publications were *Le sommeil* (1931), *Les mécanismes du cerveau* (1938), *L'image de notre corps* (1939), and *La psychopathologie de la vision* (1941). Théophile Alajouanine, head of the department of nervous system diseases at La Salpêtrière, was one of the first to study neurovascular disturbances secondary to spinal pathology. In 1949, Henri Gastaut, with Penfield and Jasper, provoked generalised epileptic seizures in experimental studies and determined that the thalamus was actively involved in these seizures.¹³⁻¹⁴

The British school of neurology shaped figures such as Walter Russell Brain in the first decades of the 20th century. Brain's *Diseases of the Nervous System*, first published in 1933, reached its third edition in 1947. This was the textbook which Spanish neurologists studied at the time.¹⁴

In Northern Europe, valuable contributions were made by such scholars as Georg Herman Monrad-Kröhn, with his *Clinical Examination of the Nervous System*. The book was translated into Spanish in 1943. Monrad-Kröhn studied the problem of aphasia from its different angles. His articles included 'Dysprosody or altered melody of the language', which was published by *Brain* in 1947. In 1946, his student Sigvald Refsum described what he termed hereditary polyneuritic ataxia; the clinical entity was not accepted at first. The syndrome was confirmed in 1963 as a congenital lipid metabolism disorder that causes accumulation of phytanic acid in various internal organs and the nervous system.¹⁴

In the United States, we find the work of H. Houston Merritt, who together with Tracy Putman in 1938 proposed numerous drugs for epilepsy treatment, including diphenylhydantoin. Other leading figures include William G. Lennox and the husband-and-wife team of Frederic Gibbs and Erna Leonhardt whose contributions included physiological and clinical studies of epilepsy.¹⁴

In the first half of the 20th century in Spain, most scholars of neurological disease worked as neuropsychiatrists. One of the very few clinical neurologists who did not practice psychiatry was Barraquer Ferré, who worked in partnership with Gispert Cruz and Castañer Ventrell to publish *Tratado de Enfermedades Nerviosas* between 1936 and 1940. Another important event was the schism between Cajal and Pío del Río-Hortega and Rafael Lorente de Nó, both of whom went into exile. Of Cajal's students, only Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora practiced clinical medicine.¹⁴

2. Advent of the Spanish Society of Neurology

The Spanish Society of Neurology was founded on 18 April de 1949. The members of its Provisional Steering Committee were Luis Barraquer Ferré (1887-1959), Antonio Subirana Oller (1904-1992), and Belarmino Rodríguez Arias (1895-1997).¹⁵ While the first two focused solely on neurology, Rodríguez Arias practiced neuropsychiatry, which was a common option at the time. All three doctors were trained by the French school of neurology; Barraquer and Rodríguez Arias had been resi-

dents in La Salpêtrière, while Subirana did his residency in Strasbourg.

On 10 December 1949, the Provisional Steering Committee decided to approve the first list of members of the SEN. Their decision was ratified in the first General Assembly held on 19 December 1949.¹⁶ At the time of its inception, the SEN consisted of 36 professional practitioners of neurology, psychiatry, neurosurgery, and related specialties. Regardless of the precise relationships between specialties, this mixed membership was a positive force which solidified the SEN's presence on both the Spanish and international medical scenes.¹⁷ International outreach was achieved by conferring honorary SEN membership on foreign scholars and the exchange of volumes of correspondence, whether privately between doctors, or officially in representation of the SEN (Table 1). When it was founded, the Society included many international members, some of whom represented long-standing medical societies, such as Société

Table 1.

Founding numerary members	
Fernando Álamos de los Ríos (Málaga)	José Monteys Viñamata (Barcelona)
Román Alberca Lorente (Murcia)	Jerónimo de Moragas Gallissá (Barcelona)
José Arigó Jiménez (Almería)	Sixto Obrador Alcalde (Madrid)
Adolfo Azoy Castañé (Barcelona)	Luis Oller Daurella (Barcelona)
Juan José Barcia Goyanes (Valencia)	Enrique Ma Peres Casañes (Barcelona)
Luis Barraquer Bordas (Barcelona)	Ricardo Puncernau Sampere (Barcelona)
Manuel Bordes Valls (Valencia)	Tomás Revilla Franco (Madrid)
Jesús Calvo Melendro (Soria)	Ricardo Roca de Viñals (Barcelona)
Alberto Casellas Condom (Girona)	Antonio Rodríguez Arias (Barcelona)
Emilio Castañer Vendrell (Barcelona)	Ramón Sales Vázquez (Barcelona)
Francisco Durán Obiols (Barcelona)	José María Simarro Puig (Barcelona)
José Ramon Espín Herrero (Valencia)	José Solé Sagarra (Barcelona)
Luis Frade Carranque (Madrid)	Eduardo Tolosa Colomer (Barcelona)
Pedro González-Quirós Isla (Oviedo)	Alberto Torra Parera (Barcelona)
Cristobal Lamote de Grignon (Barcelona)	Rafael Vara López (Madrid)
Adolfo Ley Gracia (Barcelona)	Eduardo Varela de Seijas (Madrid)
Juan José López Ibor (Madrid)	Sebastián de Vega Goicoechea (Barcelona)
José Lloberas Camino (Barcelona)	Celestino Vilumara Miralles (Barcelona)

Founding honorary members	
Thierry Alajouanine (France)	Vicente Dimitri (Argentina)
Antonio Austregesilo (Brazil)	Knud H. Krabbe (Denmark)
J. Alexandre Barré (France)	Egas Moniz (Portugal)
Robert Bing (Switzerland)	G. H. Monrad-Krohn (Norway)
Ludo van Bogaert (Belgium)	Henry Alsop Riley (USA)
W. Russell Brain (UK)	Robert Wartemberg (USA)
Honorary members	
Alfonso Asenjo (Chile)	Pierre Mollaret (France)
Frédéric Bremer (Belgium)	G. De Morsier (Switzerland)
Paul van Gehuchten (Belgium)	Henri Roger (France)
Georges Guillain (France)	Auguste Tournay (France)
	Earl A. Walker (USA)

de Neurologie de Paris; directors of publications such as *Revue Neurologique* (Paris) or *Arquivos de Neuro-psiquiatria* (Brazil); and prominent neuroscientists (Figure 1).¹⁸

The SEN's inaugural session was held on 19 December 1949 and dedicated to the memory of Luis Barraquer Roviralta (Figure 2). Some of the invitations addressed to potential honorary members and participants were channelled through the General Directorate for Cultural Relations in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This procedure was followed when Dr Henry Alsop Riley and Dr Robert Wartemberg of the United States were asked to participate in the SEN's inaugural meeting; invitations were sent through the Spanish Embassy in Washington, D.C.¹⁹ The same procedure had to be followed when inviting foreign scholars to participate in SEN meetings, which placed certain limits on scientific exchange.^{19,20}

The fact that Jean-Alexandre Barré presided over the inaugural session was symbolic of French influence on the development of neurology in Spain. During that session, several of the SEN's original members presented their lectures alongside Barré (*Les atrophies par répercussion sympathique réflexe dans les lésions périphériques*)

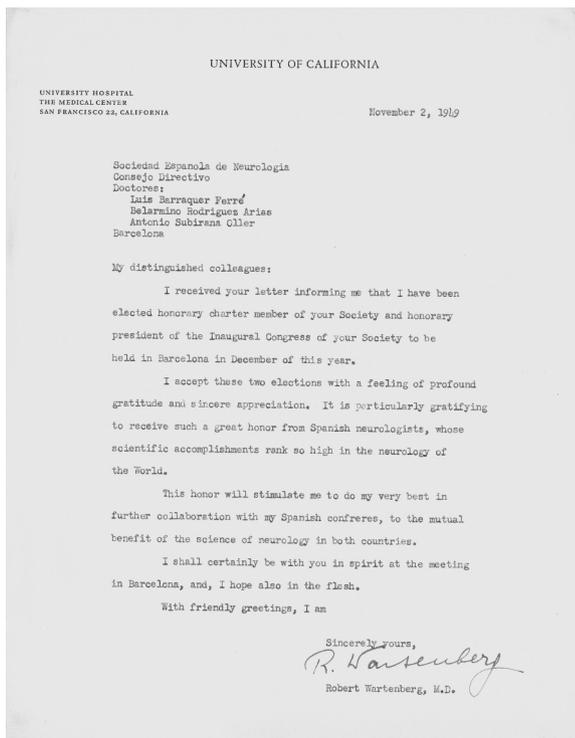


Figure 1. Robert Wartemberg. Letter to the Board of Directors of the Spanish Society of Neurology acknowledging his selection as an honorary member. 2 November 1949. Luis Barraquer Ferré and Luis Barraquer Bordas collection. SEN historical archive.



Figure 2. Inaugural session of the Spanish Society of Neurology. 19 December 1949 SEN historical archive.

and Oswaldo Freitas Julião (*Les éléments du diagnostic de la lèpre nerveuse*). Ludo van Bogaert and Sir W. Russell Brain also sent papers: *Evolution de nos connaissances sur l'athétose double* and 'The grasp reflex of the foot', respectively. Papers presented at the conference were published in a special issue of *Medicina Clínica*.²¹

3. International cooperation in the SEN's statutes and bylaws

The statutes of the Spanish Society of Neurology were drafted on 10 January 1949 and ratified on 29 March 1949 by the Provincial Civil Authority. The SEN's listed objectives as a scientific association included promoting cooperation with neurological societies from other countries (Art. 1.3) and participating in international conferences in accordance with the regulations ratified by the country representatives who attended the preparatory meeting for the 4th International Congress (Paris, July 1947) (Art. 1.4).

The SEN set about accomplishing its stated goals through academic sessions, conferences, official attendance of neurological and related congresses, and organising visits to Spain for foreign professors and making their travel arrangements.¹⁵

In the SEN's Act of Constitution, ratified on 18 April 1949, it was agreed to send corporate representatives to the 4th International Congress of Neurology (Paris, 1949).¹⁶

The meeting of the Provisional Steering Committee held on 15 July 1949 established the main lines of action that would be presented to the constituent assembly for its approval. The SEN placed considerable emphasis on its lines of action related to international outreach. These lines of action included sponsorship and cooperation

with the promotion of Spanish culture abroad in the area of neurology; cooperation as an association in activities organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Cultural Relations; official participation in international congresses; and the designation of the six Spanish delegates for the Organisational Committees. Lastly, the SEN participated in an official capacity in international congresses on related subjects: neurosurgery, oto-neuro-ophthamology, neuropsychiatry, psychiatry, and EEG studies.¹⁶ Once the proposal had been approved, the SEN drafted its specific regulations²² and a certificate stating the function of its founding members.²³

4. International neurology congresses and international corporate representation

The celebration of the first International Congresses of Neurology, beginning in 1931, contributed to the view of neurology as a legitimate specialty, created forums for exchanging ideas from different schools, and furthered the development of neurology as an independent field. Furthermore, these gatherings²⁴ were instrumental in overcoming political tensions between countries.

Following the 4th International Congress of Neurology in Paris in September 1949 and several preliminary meetings between delegates, the founders of the SEN had become convinced of the necessity of creating a society exclusively dedicated to neurology. This was a requirement in order to participate in international neurology congresses in an official capacity and build rapports with neurologists around the world (Figure 3).

The SEN gave its undivided attention to how Spanish delegates and representatives of the official committee before International Congresses would be chosen, considering that these important nominations would provide the society's international voice.

Beginning in 1944, members of the Official Spanish Committee before the International Congresses of Neurology were named by the Directorate General for Health, a dependency of the Ministry of Governance (Table 2). These nominations were made without the participation of the SEN, as reflected in its Statutes, and the SEN was deeply and vocally opposed to that state of affairs. On the other hand, the directors of the Congress itself directly selected the delegates who would represent each country attending.¹⁶

In 1957, the First International Congress of Neurological Sciences/6th International Congress of Neurology was



Figure 3. Assembly of delegates, preparatory session of the Sixth International Congress of Neurology. SEN Historical Archive.

held in Brussels from 21 to 28 July (Figure 3). The World Neurology Federation was created during that congress, with Dr. Ludo van Bogaer presiding; the SEN has been a member of the Federation ever since it was founded.²⁵

During the same congress, the newly-formed Federation required two delegates to be selected per country (an active delegate and an alternate). These posts were occupied by the SEN's president and secretary, Professor Juan José Barcia Goyanes and Dr José María Espadaler Medina, after the decision was ratified by the Assembly. Under this system, Spain counted two types of representatives; those named by the General Directorate for Health, and those selected by the SEN. The latter procedure was not standardised until 1964.^{15,26}

1929-1947 (Bern, London, and Copenhagen Congresses):	Gonzalo Rodríguez Lafora, Belarmino Rodríguez Arias, Wenceslao López Albo, E. Fernández Sanz.
1947-1951 (Paris Congress):	Juan José López Ibor, Antonio Subirana Oller, Román Alberca Lorente, Juan José Barcia Goyanes, Sixto Obrador Alcalde, Belarmino Rodríguez Arias.
1951-1957 (Lisbon and Brussels Congresses):	Juan José López Ibor, Antonio Subirana Oller, Román Alberca Lorente, Juan José Barcia Goyanes, Sixto Obrador Alcalde, Belarmino Rodríguez Arias.
1955-1957	Juan José López Ibor, Antonio Subirana Oller, Román Alberca Lorente, Juan José Barcia Goyanes, Sixto Obrador Alcalde, Belarmino Rodríguez Arias, Antonio Vallejo Nájera, José María Espadaler Medina.

Table 2. List of Spanish delegates to the International Congresses of Neurology, selected after 1944 by the General Directorate for Health (Ministry of Governance)

Discussion

The formation of professional medical societies in the 19th century, and the evolution of neurology as a separate entity from psychiatry and internal medicine, were events that served to establish the specialty.

Such societies served as forums in which professionals with similar interests would participate and make decisions regarding shared concerns. The tendency of doctors to form associations was instrumental in structuring and developing neurology as a medical specialty. Furthermore, these societies served to represent the interests and scientific findings of Spain's neurological community in both the national and international spheres.

Scientific associations began to flourish in Spain in the second half of the 19th century. Considering that many of these associations were and are the driving forces behind the advancement of the subjects they represented, it is interesting to consult different sources in order to fully understand their creation, development, and role in the international promotion of their membership.

The first neurological societies in Spain were initially linked to the field of psychiatry. It was not until 1949 that clinical neurology would proclaim its independence as a specialty with the founding of the Spanish Society of Neurology. Despite having nominally cut ties with its past, the Society's members included psychiatrists and neurosurgeons as well as clinical neurologists. In any case, diversity among its members did not interfere with the SEN's objectives.

The creation of the SEN was a turning point in the development of the specialty in Spain. The SEN was a scientific and professional association for neurologists with the stated aim of promoting further study of the discipline and establishing neurology as a full-fledged medical specialty.

The SEN's contributions followed two basic lines of action. The first addressed how to obtain the necessary representation for neurology, in both hospitals and universities, in accordance with its status as a specialty.

The second was to act in a corporate capacity as the exponent of the study of neurology in Spain and transmit its scientific findings on both the national and international levels. This activity is demonstrated by the SEN's regular and extraordinary sessions held with other Spanish medical societies, such as the Spanish Association of Neuropsychology, the Portuguese and Spanish

Society of Neurosurgery, the Iberian Oto-Neuro-Ophthalmological Society, and the different societies that made up the international scene.

Achieving international impact was one of the main objectives of the SEN's founding statutes and of the activities undertaken by the society. Its strategies in this area included conferring honorary membership on foreign scholars, inviting them to participate in scientific sessions, and extending invitations for membership and calls for publications.

One of the SEN's greatest successes was achieving representation at the International Congresses of Neurology. By this action, the SEN promoted Spanish scientific findings and achieved recognition both as a specialty and as a group. With the above in mind, it should be noted that the Society's founding members already attended international events as representatives of Spain. They also exchanged large volumes of correspondence with important members of the worldwide neurological community. From the SEN's inception, this tendency has been reflected by its articles of association and by the actions it undertook. Representing Spain in the field of neurology was a top priority for every Board of Directors of the SEN in turn.

Members of the Official Committee representing Spain before the International Congresses on Neurology were appointed by the General Directorate for Health. Most appointees at the time were psychiatrists and neurosurgeons. Despite repeated petitions to both the General Directorate and the members of the Committee, the SEN was not permitted to directly nominate its representatives and vote for them in its Assembly until 1964.

Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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