

Empowerment of young nephrologists in developing countries: the role of the ISN Young Nephrologists Committee

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The International Society of Nephrology (ISN) established the Young Nephrologists Committee (YNC) in 2007 to increase the awareness of the ISN mission and activities among younger nephrologists and thus increase their involvement. One of the primary aims of the YNC is to empower young nephrologists from developing countries by providing education and mentoring support. This is being achieved by establishing ISN YN workshops in the developing world for junior medical staff and nephrology trainees, with local younger nephrologists supervising the workshops. Mentoring is important for young nephrologists, and the ISN YNC have established a mentoring program through the ISN where mentors and the mentored are matched, and also meet-the professor sessions at ISN Nexus conferences. Research is being encouraged by establishing the World Congress of Nephrology Young Nephrology awards in basic and clinical science from the developing and developed world, allowing young nephrologists the opportunity to attend the WCN and present their work in plenary sessions. Another important focus of the ISN YNC has been to raise the awareness of ISN activities and their relevance to young nephrologists in the developing world. In conclusion, the ISN YNC is hoping to empower young nephrologists from developing countries and this will improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of kidney disease worldwide.

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Empowerment is not a bricks and mortar kind of thing. It is an atmosphere that transcends place. Its a way of interacting – a smiling face, a word of encouragement, a listening ear, a question or two that leads a young person to find a solution to his or her own problem.’ Paula Morris, founder and president of Kids of Honor.¹

There are many ways in which young nephrologists can empower other young nephrologists in developing countries. One of the most important is providing nephrology education that is appropriate to the region with respect to the patients and diseases seen, racial and cultural differences, and the available resources. Young nephrologists can also provide mentoring to other young nephrologists and trainees, and may be able to assist in obtaining financial support when required. Hopefully, by supporting young nephrologists from developing countries they will be empowered to train other young nephrologists, and thus there is a ‘snowball effect’ that will continue to improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of kidney disease worldwide.

The International Society of Nephrology (ISN) established the Young Nephrologists Committee (YNC) in 2007 to increase the involvement of young nephrologists in the international nephrology community. This included promotion of the ISN to young nephrologists from both developed and developing countries, detailing the ISN activities such as global outreach programs, sister centers, fellowships, research and prevention proposals, and educational ambassadors. There was a specific focus on improving the education of young nephrologists, particularly those from the developing countries, and also on encouraging more nephrology trainees worldwide. The original ISN YNC was made up of 11 members under the age of 40 and was representative of the ISN membership, with 3 members from the Asia-Pacific region (32.5% of ISN members), 3 from Europe (23.5%), 3 from North America and Canada (23.5%), 1 from Central and South America (8.2%), and 1 from Africa (2.6%). The members are on the committee for 2 years to ensure that the membership remains young and enthusiastic, and new members are now under the age of 37.

As Sir Francis Bacon commented in 1597, ‘knowledge is power’, the importance of education in improving the health of the population in the developing countries cannot be

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underestimated, and in general the young are easier to educate as they have an increased capacity to learn and accept new ideas, as they are more flexible and prepared for change. In addition, they think more laterally and have more energy, drive, enthusiasm, and optimism than the elderly. The ISN YNC have organized successful education workshops in developing countries, which involved small-group interactive sessions run by local young nephrologists and, when needed, international speakers with a target audience including medical students, junior residents, nephrology trainees, and general practitioners. The nephrology topics discussed were important to the region, and as the workshops were supervised by local nephrologists the discussions were based on the resources available. The first ISN YNC Education workshop was held in collaboration with the Brazil Society of Nephrology at their scientific meeting in Victoria, Brazil, on 11 September 2010 with Roberto Pecoits-Filho as our local YNC member. One hundred and twenty delegates attended, with a combination of medical students and renal trainees. The feedback was very positive; in particular the workshops on career advice were very well received. The funding was from the YNC, the Brazil Society of Nephrology, and pharmaceutical support. The second workshop was organized in collaboration with the ISN Global Outreach program in Dakar, Senegal, February 2011, with YNC members Fatiu Arogundade and Aggrey Mweeba being involved along with 90 participants. Future workshops are planned for India and China, with local YNC members Manisha Sahay and Qiquan Sun organizing the programs.

The ISN YNC has established a mentorship initiative to empower young nephrologists. This matches young and older nephrologists internationally to provide support in many different ways, including career advice, acute patient care problems, research possibilities, and organization of ongoing educational activities. The initial expression of interest matched 18 pairs and we are hoping to expand the program with another expression of interest planned for this year. In addition, we have established a Meet-the-Professor session at the ISN Nexus meetings and may introduce this in the ISN forefronts meetings. The first Meet-the-Professor session was held in Kyoto, 2010, at the ISN Nexus on the kidney and the vascular system. This was very successful, with 240 delegates attending. These junior nephrologists and scientists had access to more senior experienced colleagues in an informal environment and we are hoping that this may lead to more mentoring opportunities in the future.

The establishment of the ISN YNC World Congress of Nephrology awards in 2008 encourages young nephrologists from developing and developed countries to develop research projects in both basic and clinical nephrology science and gives them the opportunity to present their work to a large international audience at the WCN, and also to attend other ISN conferences such as Nexus or Forefronts. We had 576

applicants for the four WCN 2011 YN awards. The successful candidates are Dr Wei Qin from China, Dr Mayumi Tomita from Japan, Dr Lantang Huang from China, and Dr Alice Bonnani from Italy. The four winners were invited to present their abstracts at plenary sessions at the WCN 2011. The award covers travel costs and registration for the WCN in addition to registration for another ISN meeting within 2 years, such as Forefront or Nexus. It is a great opportunity for young nephrologists, particularly those from developing countries, to be able to attend and present their work at a major plenary session at an international nephrology conference, and this will hopefully inspire future research and contribute to their career in nephrology.

Another important focus of the ISN YNC has been to raise the awareness of ISN activities and their relevance to young nephrologists. It is important to increase support for young nephrologists from developing countries with affordable group ISN memberships, allowing them access to the gateway with online education, journals such as *KI* and *NCPN*, and informing them of other education programs such as GO and interactive YNC workshops, ISN fellowships, sister centers, research and prevention, and access to ISN educational ambassadors. Many of the current YNC members are also members of other ISN committees such as the education committee, publications committee, and global outreach education advisory and research and prevention committees, and this means that there is an increasing voice for the young nephrologists internationally and this will hopefully strengthen the ISN.

In conclusion, the ISN YNC is hoping to empower young nephrologists from developing countries and this will improve the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of kidney disease worldwide.

DISCLOSURE

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