



Editorial

Fifteen-year history of the European head and neck society



Introduction

The European Head and Neck Society (EHNS) was formally established in 2006. Its intent is to promote exchange of knowledge in all aspects of head and neck neoplastic diseases and to promote the highest standards of research, education and training, disease prevention and patient care. It is a multidisciplinary body bringing together clinicians (for example head and neck/oral/plastic surgeons, radiation therapists, medical oncologists, imaging specialists, pathologists), other health professionals (for example speech therapists, cancer nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, dieticians, social workers), basic scientists and patient organizations involved in any aspect of head and neck oncology [1]. This paper describes the development and the progress of EHNS accomplished in 15 years.

The proposal

In November 2001 First European Conference on Head and Neck Cancer took place in Lille, which lies in the triangle linking Europe's main metropolises. Until this time, in many European countries, separate head and neck oncology societies or working groups have been active. For the past couple of decades, the British, Dutch and Scandinavian societies of head and neck oncologists have held periodic joint scientific meetings that have been of a high standard and mutually beneficial. Many felt a strong desire to widen this activity to Europe as a whole and to provide to all specialists involved in head and neck cancer a common platform to meet and discuss together. In order to assess the feasibility of such a European venture, it was decided to come together to convert the three societies' meeting into the European Conference on Head and Neck Cancer. Four main topics in the field of Head and Neck Oncology were selected and discussed from a European perspective: epidemiology, oropharyngeal carcinoma, novel diagnostic methods and therapies, and quality-of-life issues. The content, attendance (from 19 different European countries) and facilities were all regarded as highly successful. It was here that on the initiative of representatives a consensus rose on the need of this kind of European society as a 'society of societies'.

The formation

The concept of creating a multidisciplinary head and neck society in Europe stems from the "Second European Conference on Head and Neck Cancer" in Lille in 2003. The respective presidents of the European national societies (or their representatives) here discussed the form and structure of the new society. A founding board was given the task to organize its inception and to do everything in the interest of the new society until an elected board was in place. This idea was proposed

to European leaders in head and neck oncology, and European Head and Neck Society was founded in 2003 at this conference [2]. Jean-Louis Lefebvre and Dominique Chevalier, both from France, Guy Andry from Belgium, Newell Johnson from United Kingdom, René Leemans from the Netherlands, and Jan Olofsson from Norway were the organizers for two first European Conferences [3]. This organizing committee along with Patrick Bradley from UK became the first founding board between 2003 and 2007. The official documents were signed by this founding Board, and the EHNS formally established in Brussels, Belgium in 2006. There were eight beginning member societies, including France, United Kingdom, Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland and Spain. The efforts of the founding committee need special recognition in the progress of EHNS.

Multidisciplinary team (MDT)

Management of head and neck cancer has changed dramatically during the past two decades due to ongoing improvements in multidisciplinary approaches that allows following evidence-based algorithms to guide treatments resulting in improved function and quality of life. The need for multidisciplinary team (MDT) work has been clearly described in the literature. MDT approach and better adherence to the treatment protocols are generally adapted in developed countries, where the health systems are much better organized. The multidisciplinary collaboration is now well implemented in large academic/teaching institutes in Europe. However, this is not the reality for every medical center. The task of EHNS in improving MDT strategies in Europe must be highlighted.

The EHNS was originally developed by surgeons all performing head and neck cancer, who recognized the importance of collaboration with different specialties. In this perspective, EHNS achieved a critical goal in bringing variety of disciplines together. It is a "Society of societies", and composed of individual persons, national and multi-national societies, associated study groups oriented towards head and neck cancer research, training and treatment throughout Europe and elsewhere in the world. The society is led by a President and Secretary General, supported by a Treasurer, Past-President and five Board members. The current board of EHNS represents multidisciplinary composition including head and neck surgery, oral and maxillo-facial surgery, radiation oncology and medical oncology.

In progress

The EHNS is still growing. Multidisciplinary structure is imperative for being a member of the EHNS. There are currently 25-member societies from 31 countries (Table 1). At present, the number of individuals from participating societies reaches up to 2800 clinicians,

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Table 1
National Membership of EHNS.

Member Countries in 2019 (31 members)
Armenia
Austria
Belarus
Belgium
Croatia
Czech Republic – Czechia
Denmark
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
Iceland
Israel
Italy
Kazakhstan
Latvia
Lithuania
The Netherlands
Norway
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
Serbia
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Turkey
United Kingdom

health professionals and basic scientists, who involved in any aspect of head and neck oncology. The aim of the EHNS is to promote exchange of knowledge in all aspects of head and neck neoplastic diseases and to provide the highest standards of research, education and training, disease prevention and patient care.

Since 2001 the EHNS is conducting a biennial European Conference on Head and Neck Oncology (ECHNO) with participation of multidisciplinary specialists. Former ECHNO meetings is given in Table 2. The next congresses will be in Brussels, Belgium (2020) and in Lisbon, Portugal (2022), organized by Guy Andry and Anna Castro, respectively. One of the main intentions of the society is to encourage and coordinate training on head and neck cancer throughout Europe. Over the past years, the EHNS has continued to provide and promote education every year with European Head and Neck Course (EHNC). EHNC is a three-day course about current management of head and neck cancer within a multidisciplinary framework. These courses have been holding every year since 2008, alternately in Birmingham, Amsterdam

Table 2
European Conference on Head and Neck Oncology (ECHNO) meetings organized by EHNS.

Year	Site	Host
2001	Lille	Dr. Jean Louis Lefebvre Dr. Dominique Chevalier
2003	Lille	Dr. Jean Louis Lefebvre Dr. Dominique Chevalier
2008	Zagreb	Dr. Miljenko Bura
2010	Athens	Dr. Alexander Ravidis
2012	Poznan	Dr. Wojciech Golusinski
2014	Liverpool	Dr. James Brown
2016	Budapest	Dr. Sefik Hosal
2018	Rome	Dr. Giuseppe Spriano
2020	Brussels	Dr. Guy Andry Dr. Frederic Duprez
2022	Lisbon	Dr. Ana Castro

and Poznan, with permanent Directorship. There is mounting evidence on the human papilloma virus (HPV) in the development of oropharyngeal cancer. In this regard, the EHNS collaborates with the Dutch Head and Neck Society, Head and Neck Group of the German Cancer Society and Polish Society of Head and Neck Cancer to organize “International Symposium on HPV Infection in Head and Neck Cancer” again in interdisciplinary composition. The intent is to facilitate education and exchange knowledge on HPV in conjunction with preclinical investigation and modern treatment techniques. In the last decade transoral oral robotic surgery has become an alternative for classical surgery in the contemporary management of oropharyngeal cancer. In this regard, European Workshops on “Robotic Surgery in Head and Neck” have been organized under the auspices of EHNS emphasizing the role of transoral and robotic surgical techniques in the current multidisciplinary management of head and neck cancer.

In collaboration with the “European Society for Therapeutic Radiation and Oncology” the first “International Conference on Innovative Approaches in Head and Neck Oncology” (ICHNO) was held in Barcelona, Spain in 2007. The second edition, in 2009 when the “European Society of Medical Oncology” also joined forces. All these platforms help to increase international cooperation in the field and to foster professional relations. ICHNO meetings are biennial conferences focusing on multidisciplinary management of head and neck cancer. EHNS is a member of the “Confederation of the European Otorhinolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery, CEORL-HNS”. Moreover, the EHNS cooperates with the “International Federation of Head and Neck Oncologic Societies” and with the “International Academy of Oral Oncology”. More recently, the EHNS collaborated with “European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer” (EORTC) for carrying out scientific projects and clinical trials. The EHNS recommends participation to the studies from centers in central and Eastern Europe, to elevate the standard of parent organization, to guide updated research methodology, and to contribute in publications.

Current highlight – Make sense campaign

In 2013, EHNS established the *Make Sense* campaign to drive awareness and education on the risk factors, disease prevention, and signs and symptoms of head and neck cancer. The need for which was demonstrated through the results of two European wide surveys about the general public and physician awareness of head and neck cancer, About Face 1 and About Face 2.

The Campaign is divided into four taskforces, each designed to address unmet needs. To drive the *Make Sense* campaign forward, the EHNS developed a Steering Committee, with each member taking responsibility for the four taskforces: Awareness Raising, Partnership Building, Healthcare Professional Education and Emotive Support.

Annually, local teams across Europe execute activities to support these taskforces, with the majority of activities taking place during the annual Awareness Week; held in the third week of September. Participation in the Campaign has increased annually, and the Campaign has gone from strength-to-strength since its inception, with activities conducted in 18 countries across Europe, South America and Asia. In the last six years, the Campaign has implemented a number of successful activities, and this is the result of the hard work and dedication of stakeholders across Europe, including patients, healthcare professionals, sponsors, and members of parliament, just to name a few. Since 2013, we’ve seen a phenomenal response with under 80,000 people attending head and neck cancer screenings in more than 1000 clinics across Europe; 350,000 leaflets have been distributed, and 4408 pieces of original coverage generated. The latest theme was *Supporting Survivorship*, highlights getting the attention from the public, has reached more than 35,000 people of Facebook and achieved over 127,000 impressions on Twitter. The Campaign hopes to maintain its positive momentum and high levels of engagement.

Future

The world changes every day, and the progress in the field of medicine is significant. As the dogmas of science change, the diagnosis and management of head and neck cancer need to be modified accordingly. These changes also indubitably influence the actions and activities of a large European scientific society. Within European continent, head and neck cancer patients have access to medical services which are defined by the level and experience of the centers. The EHNS is highly determined to create an educational platform for the exchange of thoughts and experiences in the field of diagnosis and treatment of head and neck cancer. This has to be achieved not only through conferences, but first and foremost through direct contact between the centers which are frontrunners in Europe and centers in which the idea of interdisciplinarity has just beginning to develop. Moreover, the future strategy of EHNS is to create an educational platform for training of young generation using an e-learning platform.

Conclusion

Starting a new scientific society needs motivation, but achieving the goals is another matter. Success is mainly associated with planned collaboration with other disciplines by learning from each other. The members of the EHNS have particular prospects to improve and reinforce expertise. The EHNS is very active multidisciplinary international society leading in Europe in the field with gradually increasing members. In the last 15 years the Society has made an incredible progress and secured a firm position in the structure of European societies. This has been accomplished with appreciated efforts of many colleagues throughout the years.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that

they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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