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Editorial

The new Committee of the SSN, as elected by the membership last January, held its first meeting in May. While we could throw a satisfactory look over the past year, we realize that much remains to be done for the SSN to be playing a significant role in promoting Neuroscience in Switzerland. The number of members is stable and the financial situation of the society is satisfactory, mainly due to successful sponsoring and regular income from the Annual Meeting. The current resources, if maintained at this level, will allow us to sponsor the awards and travel fellowships introduced last year (see page 2). They do not allow much more, although the Council feels that the SSN should be much more active in the field of Public Awareness and should foster links with clinicians. The quest for more members and the development of links with other professional societies therefore remain a primary goal for the Council.

The purpose of this Newsletter is to provide some reflection on the future of the SSN (see page 3). We bring several ideas forward, waiting for your feedback. The SSN is here to serve its membership and the best way to achieve this goal is to generate a permanent interaction. We hope that you will react to this invitation and give us some hints in which direction we should develop our society. The SSN is also part of a broader network of Societies, one of the most active being the IBRO. The movement brought forward by this organization is most impressive (see page 4) and should catalyze our own future.

In the name of the committee, I wish you a pleasant summer and look forward to your input.

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The SSN 2003 Best Publication Award

Following its introduction last year, this Award will be given to a student-member of the SSN, first author of the best publication that appeared or went to press between July 1, 2002 and June 30, 2003 in a peer-reviewed journal. The jury will be composed of 5 members of the SSN Committee. The award ceremony will take place during the next annual meeting (Lausanne, January 17th, 2004).

The rules for the Award are posted on the Website. The Award is reserved to student-members (or to members who have graduated in 2002). The application should include:

- The article to be awarded (reprint or pdf-file)
- A short description of the significance of the work (max. one A4 page)
- A letter of support from the main supervisor of the student describing his/her contribution to the article to be awarded
- A curriculum vitae

The deadline for submission is September 30st, 2003.

The criteria for selection include originality and relevance of the study, quality of the article, ranking of the journal, overall scientific performance of the applicant. Only manuscripts reporting work performed mainly by the applicant as part of an MD or PhD thesis will be considered. We are looking forward to receiving numerous submissions.

2003 Travel fellowships

This year, the SSN awarded five travel fellowships to attend the 6th IBRO meeting in Prague. The five winners of this fellowship are:

- Amine Bahi, Institute of Biochemistry, University of Fribourg
- Caroline Durif, Institute of Physiology, University of Fribourg
- Aubin Michalon, Institute of Cell Biology, ETHZ
- Monical Solini, Dept. of Pharmacology, University of Geneva
- Dimitrula Arabadzisz, Institute of Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of Zurich.

In addition, 19 applications have been received for the 10 travel fellowships to attend the Annual Meeting of the Society for Neuroscience (New Orleans, November 6-11, 2003). This relatively small number of applications raises the question whether all potential applicants were informed about this funding option. The selection is under way and the winners will be announced in the next Newsletter.

The IBRO fellowship for young investigators

This yearly fellowship is given by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF), in collaboration with the SSN, which collects and evaluates applications. The SNF makes its selection based on our recommendation. Support is given to a foreign postdoctoral fellow to perform basic or clinical research for one year in a Swiss Academic Institution. This year, the fellowship was awarded to Dr. Vitaliy Semenin, from Ukraine, who will be working on a clinical research project at the Psychiatric University Clinic in Basel.

The call for applications for the next round will be published in the next Newsletter. The fellowship is reserved in priority for applicants from outside Western Europe. This early announcement should therefore contribute to find potential candidates for next year.

What future for the SSN?

The SSN was founded during the early phase of the Decade of the Brain to become an active proponent of basic and clinical Neuroscience research in Switzerland. The Society grew quickly to become the fifth largest Neuroscience Society in Europe, and has established solid traditions, such as the Annual Meeting held jointly with a clinical society, and the travel fellowships for student-members and postdoctoral fellows.

This phase of initial growth is apparently over, although only a minority of Neurobiologists in Switzerland have become members of the SSN. Efforts to attract novel members have to be continued, because we have a high turnover reflecting the mobility of Neuroscientists. While the “raison d’être” of our Society is well recognized by sponsors, the stagnation of our membership stands in striking contrast to the vitality of Neuroscience Societies in surrounding countries, not to mention the Society for Neuroscience or the IBRO.

With about 500 members, we are clearly limited by our financial means compared to larger societies in Europe. This situation should be no excuse for inactivity, but reflection is needed to decide which direction(s) our Society should take, and which initiatives it should develop in priority.

During the last meeting of the Committee, several possibilities were discussed. First of all, we considered that the ultimate goals of the SSN should be to become representative of all major trends of Neuroscience research in Switzerland and to foster the links between basic and clinical research. To this end, closer contacts will be taken with sister societies from the various fields of clinical Neuroscience. In addition, the Council felt that closer links with basic research

Societies would strengthen the SSN, and it was decided to explore the opportunity and consequences of becoming a member-society of the USGEB.

The second possibility envisaged is to increase the public visibility of the SSN by taking an active part in the manifestations of Brain Awareness Week. In 2005, the activities of the “International Brain Week” will be organized within frame of the second festival organized by “Science et Cité”, under the heading “Sciences, Arts et Conscience”. The SSN Council is determined that our Society should actively participate to this major event in order to promote our goals within the public at large.

Further possibilities could and should emerge from our membership. Following the example of the French “Société des Neurosciences”, Chapters representing a specific area of research could be created and have their own activities; the annual meeting could be supplemented by workshops, teaching a particular method or addressing a hot-topic of major interest to a subset of members; the possibility should be explored, whether the SSN could sponsor the organization of training workshops on animal experimentation; such workshops would help to comply with the novel law on animal experimentation, which requires 4 days of continuous education every four years (see www.bvet.admin.ch).

A number of additional suggestions are conceivable, which would strengthen our Society and make it at the same time more attractive for prospective members. We would very much appreciate the feedback of the membership about these propositions. Please let us know your suggestions in a short e-mail to ssn@pharma.unizh.ch.

News from the FENS and the IBRO

The 4th Forum of European Neuroscience will take place in Lisbon, 10-14 July 2004. The preliminary program (plenary lectures and symposia) can be consulted on www.fens2004.org. In particular, the program committee has received over 150 applications for Symposia, reflecting the dynamism of the field, but making the selection task rather difficult!

FENS members, i.e. members of societies affiliated to FENS, such as the SSN, have the possibility to register to the 33rd Neuroscience Meeting (New Orleans, 8-12 November, 2003) at the same reduced rate as SfN members. For more information, consult www.sfn.org.

The sixth IBRO World Congress of Neuroscience took place in Prague, July 10-15. The meeting was attended by almost 3000 participants from 65 countries and was highly successful thanks to an attractive program and an excellent organization. At this occasion, the IBRO held a meeting of its Governing Council (i.e., representatives of all member societies), during which important news were communicated:

During the last years, owing to the strong impulse given by its Secretary General, Albert Aguayo, the IBRO has become a very active organization. The number of member-societies has increased from 56 to 70 within 2 years. The IBRO website registers close to 100'000 hits every day and has become an invaluable source of information about funding options, continuous education, and resources in Neuroscience. The IBRO plays an essential role in the development of Neuroscience in “poor” countries and will devote large resources to promote the return of educated scientists to their homeland, thereby limiting the brain drain affecting these countries.

As announced in the previous Newsletter, the IBRO has proceeded last spring with the election of four members of the Western European Regional Committee. Two representatives nominated by the SSN were elected, namely our former President Ann Kato and Wolfram Schultz (University of Cambridge). With this choice, Switzerland will be well represented in this Committee.

The IBRO has also proceeded with the election of two important officers. Steven Redman (Australian National University, Camberra) will serve as new Treasurer-general and Piergiorgio Strata (University of Torino) as head of the publication committee, which oversees “Neuroscience”, the official journal of the IBRO.

The royalties from “Neuroscience” represent the main income source of the IBRO (close to US\$ 2 million in 2002). In other words, all activities of the IBRO depend heavily on the success of this journal. The novel Editorial board, headed by D. Amaral and O.P. Ottersen, has undertaken a profound uplifting of the journal. They are calling for increased submissions in order to improve the standing and the impact factor of the journal.

Preview of the SSN 2004 Annual Meeting

The next annual meeting of the SSN will take place in Lausanne (CHUV, Grand Auditoire) on January 17, 2004. It will be organized together with the Swiss Society of Behavioral Neurology. Two plenary lectures are planned (W. Singer and U. Frith) and the programme will include the traditional highlights (Datablitz) and Award Sessions (Best clinical study, Best poster, 2003 Best publication).

The detailed program will be announced in the next Newsletter (September 2003), along with the call for abstracts and on-line registration.