

Creating a junior minds' community: The Swiss Association of Young Neurologists

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Arseny A Sokolov¹ and Rebekka Kurmann²

Abstract

Connecting with junior colleagues across the three linguistic regions of Switzerland, knowing the essentials of the Swiss neurology curriculum, conducting research, considering a fellowship abroad, preparing neurological activity in private practice – all these topics are of vital interest for young neurologists. However, keeping up with such essential aspects of neurological training usually turns out quite demanding for residents as individuals. Junior neurologists' associations help to deal with such issues. In 2014, a group of enthusiastic juniors, encouraged by several senior neurologists, founded the Swiss Association of Young Neurologists (SAYN) within the Swiss Neurological Society (SNS). Here, we describe key missions and activities of the SAYN, its role and interactions within the Swiss and European clinical neuroscience community, and provide an outlook on future challenges and opportunities for young neurologists.

Keywords

Education, neurology, association, career development

Connecting with junior colleagues across the three linguistic regions of Switzerland, knowing the essentials of the FMH (Swiss Medical Association) neurology curriculum, conducting research, considering a fellowship abroad and preparing neurological activity in private practice – all these topics are of vital interest for young neurologists. However, keeping up with such essential aspects of neurological training usually turns out quite demanding for residents as individuals. Junior neurologists' associations, such as the Association des Assistants et Internes en Neurologie de France¹ established in 1997 or the German Junge Neurologen² created in 2008, help to jointly deal with such issues. On 31 October 2014 in Interlaken, a group of enthusiastic juniors, encouraged by several senior neurologists, founded the Swiss Association of Young Neurologists (SAYN) within the Swiss Neurological Society (SNS).

Primary aims of the SAYN are to link young neurologists in Switzerland and to promote opportunities for exchange early in their careers, also across 'national linguistic borders'. To this end, a Facebook-based exchange platform was established beginning of 2017, allowing young neurologists to find exchange partners at hospitals they want to spend clinical or research time at. A first exchange between Bern and Lausanne is currently

underway. The 'Forum of Young Neurologists', a mentoring session with regard to different career paths in neurology, has been held at the SNS Annual Meeting since 2014. The SAYN does not limit its activity to informing young neurologists about key points of the FMH neurology curriculum, with its updated version in effect since July 2016, but, in the future, will also contribute to shaping these regulations and conditions for clinical neurology training in Switzerland.

Another important endeavour of the SAYN is to support young neurologists' academic development. Currently, information on clinical research opportunities in Swiss neurology, funding and research fellowships abroad is being

¹Service of Neurology, Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois, Lausanne, Switzerland

²Department of Neurology, Inselspital, Bern University Hospital, University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Corresponding author:

Arseny A Sokolov, Service de Neurologie, Département des Neurosciences Cliniques, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vaudois, Rue du Bugnon 46, Lausanne 1011, Switzerland.

Email: arseny.sokolov@chuv.ch



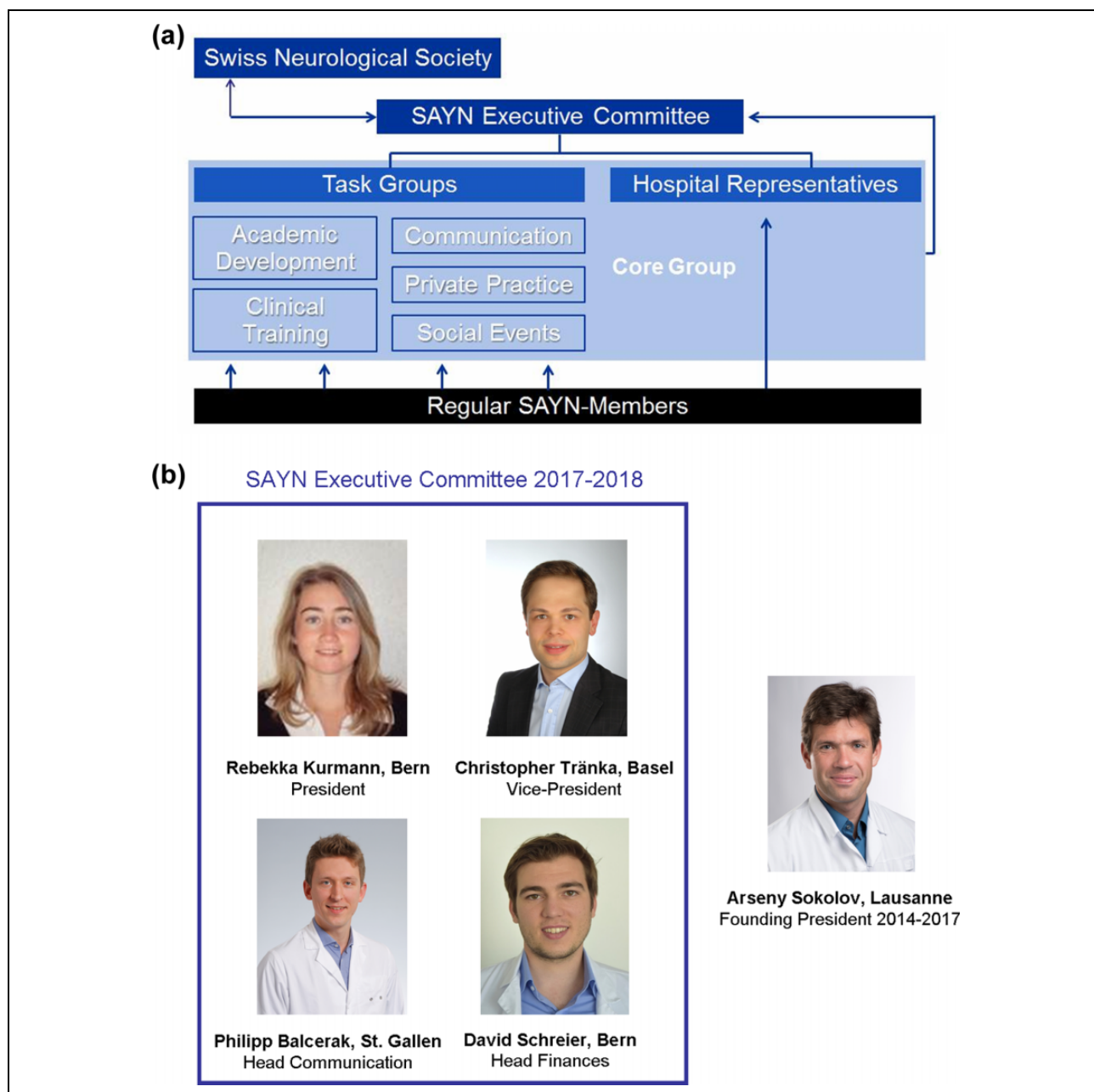


Figure 1. Executive Committee and Organization of the SAYN. (a) Every student, resident or fellow aiming for a Swiss FMH specialization in neurology can enter the SAYN by joining the SNS as a Young Neurologist member. Every neurology A-department appoints two representatives who promote discussion of local issues in the SAYN Core Group and transmit relevant information back to their department. SAYN projects are conducted by the representatives and other motivated SAYN members within dedicated task groups covering all aspects relevant to neurological trainees and the Association's functioning. The representatives elect the SAYN Executive Committee (one vote per department) that steers and represents the association. (b) The SAYN Executive Committee is composed of the president (elected for 2 years), the vice-president and the head officers for communication and finances (elected annually). The founding and past presidents are consultants to the Executive Committee. SAYN: Swiss Association of Young Neurologist; SNS: Swiss Neurological Society; FMH: Swiss Medical Association.

gathered and will soon be accessible to SAYN members. The SAYN has successfully initiated scientific events exclusively featuring scientifically active juniors in order to enhance their visibility and presentation skills, such as the 'GemSession' at the SNS Annual Meetings 2015 and 2017 or the 'Young Clinical Neuroscientists (YouClin)'

session at the Swiss Federation of Clinical Neuro-Societies (SFCNS) Meeting 2016. The best abstracts of junior scientists are selected by an expert jury for presentation in these sessions, and the best presenters are recognized by a Déjérine-Dubois Award or a YouClin Award, respectively.



Figure 2. The SAYN Core Group at its last workshop in Vitznau, June 2017. SAYN: Swiss Association of Young Neurologist.

Despite increasing efforts, contact with private neurological practice usually remains somewhat underrepresented during neurological training. The SAYN intends to develop concepts for further improving interaction between neurologists in training and those in private practice, to provide significant two-way flow of information, to better guide development of interested juniors towards private practice and thus to help ensure continuity of neurological care. Recently, the SAYN has been mandated by the SNS to contribute to evaluation and development of a rotation concept for neurology residents into private practice.

A highly motivated core group drives these SAYN activities (Figure 1). The core group meets for fruitful biannual workshops throughout Switzerland, with the last held in June 2017 in Vitznau (Figure 2) and the next taking place in autumn 2017 in Zurich. Motivated teams work on the different projects and topics that matter to young neurologists. To join the SAYN, neurologists in training can apply for a Young Neurologist membership of the SNS, previously an SNS junior membership. Importantly, the Young Neurologist membership can already be obtained during internal medicine training when an FMH title in neurology is aimed for and is valid until 1 year after having obtained the FMH title, without further age restrictions.

Since official introduction of the Young Neurologist membership end of 2015, the SAYN has welcomed over 85 new members.

Discussions about significant topics, local input and feedback are ensured by local representatives (Figure 1), two per neurology A-department (Aarau, Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Lugano, St Gallen and Zurich). They gather requests and questions to be discussed within the SAYN core group and inform on SAYN activities and recent developments relevant for young neurologists. The representatives also ensure outreach towards medical students who may be interested in neurology. In collaboration with senior neurologists, the SAYN informs on neurology training at the medical student fair MediFuture, held every November in Bern.

The overarching aim to represent young neurologists' interests is ensured by a permanent seat including a voting right for the SAYN president granted by the SNS in its Board and within the SNS Commission of Young Neurologists (same as the SAYN Executive Committee; Figure 1). Moreover, the SAYN president has been recently invited by the Swiss Society for Clinical Neurophysiology to regularly attend its Board meetings as a guest in order to provide input to neurophysiological aspects of the curriculum.

Similar efforts to assemble and represent junior interests have already been undertaken in other specialties, countries and at the international level.^{1,2,4} The SAYN has connected with the Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society to initiate discussion between neighbouring clinical neuroscience disciplines and develop the YouClin Network within the SFCNS. Interaction with the Young Swiss Society for Neuroscience to set up joint efforts for academic development is also underway. Finally, the SAYN has established a close cooperation with the Resident and Research Fellow Section of the European Academy of Neurology (EAN).^{3,4} The SAYN has played a major role in drafting a mentoring program for all European residents that is currently under consideration by the EAN.

The unique spirit of bringing together young neurologists in a multicultural and multilingual country, exchanging ideas and experience, and developing projects to further improve professional development of Swiss neurologists has been extremely stimulating and impressive for everybody involved over the past 30 months. Many senior neurologists observing the SAYN development have pointed out they would have greatly appreciated such an opportunity during their training years.

Taken together, with its multiple areas of activity driven by dedicated juniors in its core group, the SAYN attempts to represent the interests and needs of young neurologists in Switzerland and to provide solutions and assistance. The SAYN core group welcomes input from everyone and is

open for active participation to all Young Neurologist members of the SNS who wish to join.

Last but not least, the social aspect as one of the SAYN founding essences needs to be continuously nurtured, and so the SAYN has started to organize social evenings during the annually held Academy of Young Neurologists and SNS Annual Meeting.

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