

European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees: Position Paper on Teaching Courses for Generation Y

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Key Words

Education · Young neurologist · Teaching course

Abstract

The European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees (EAYNT) is a non-profit organization which acts on behalf of young neurologists in Europe and concertedly exerts influence on the formation of a new generation of neurologists [Struhal et al.: Eur J Neurol 2009;16:e146–e148]. This concerns particularly the Generation Y (Gen Y), also known as Millennial Generation, Digital Natives or Generation Next, a demographic cohort defined by birth between 1981 and 1999 [Elkind: Neurology 2009;72:657–663]. A unifying feature is the increased use and familiarity with online media and digital technologies. Online social networks and interactive communication have not only shaped this cohort but necessitate a different approach towards educational matters. This position paper aims to address the changing needs for Gen Yers in the context of education.

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Background

Generation Yers (Gen Y) require choices in everything they do and are accustomed to receive responses to questions around the clock, and believe that technology can, and probably will, solve most of the problems [3]. They prefer almost any method other than simply being 'taught'. This behavior augments the development of online teaching structures ('e-learning'). A major difference between both tools are the personal contact between teachers and trainees. In teaching courses, trainees might influence the course directly and discuss the content with both teachers and other trainees. Therefore, we believe that teaching courses are and will continue to be an educational aid of central importance but the general concept needs to be adapted to the demand of Gen Y students. The motivation to book a teaching course for residents and trainees is manifold and may range from insight into a topic not covered at their institution, gathering hands-on experience from specialists or catch up with the latest technological advances. However, we are fully aware that teaching courses are not only focusing on the needs of young neurologists. Also experienced colleagues employ this learning tool for self-assessment and continuing medical education [4].

Topic Selection

In recent years, major European bodies have recognized the demand to consider the young neurologist's voice in various committees, an action which we greatly appreciate [5, 6]. Congress program committees, however, currently continue to be a domain of established faculty and a call for a young neurologists delegate is eagerly awaited. Such committees not only determine the scientific content of a congress but also decide on topics of teaching courses. We believe that there is a major demand to include sessions aimed at improving the performance and excellence of young neurologists beyond the frame of acquiring up-to-date knowledge in teaching courses. Resolving personal conflicts, breaking 'bad news' to patients and relatives, advocating patient's or doctor's interests, working in a team or ethical considerations in neurology are currently only marginally covered but are important issues in daily practice. Similarly, being familiar with situations involving 'medical errors' or 'worst-case scenarios' are important requisites for 21st century neurologists.

Speakers

Experts or opinion leaders in the field with sufficient knowledge of the congress language play a key role for a successful teaching course. Speakers should (i) be capable of providing hands-on experience in their field of expertise, (ii) have a scientific record, and (iii) have sufficient rhetorical skills for a coherent and comprehensible illustration and discussion of difficult issues and should be open and skilled in responding to questions. While the first requirement is not easy to assess, the second might nowadays be evaluated within seconds searching Medline or other databases. Among young neurologists, this is a common approach, despite being controversial. The third point is however a core competence of a teaching course speaker and should be a prerequisite. We are very much aware that we propose quality criteria which are difficult to assess. However, Gen Y neurologists will evaluate speakers and subsequently the performance of the teaching course on the basis of such criteria. Experiences might be reported on web-blogs and may have impact on further courses. Course participants may also be interested to approach speakers via internet days and weeks after the course in order to discuss contents of the course or individual cases of their own. The potential willingness of the speaker for such action needs to be communicated. Organizers need to be aware of their responsibility

on the quality of the teaching courses and evaluate questionnaires filled out after each session in order to steadily improve the concept.

Target Audience

The target audience for the teaching course needs to be defined clearly. A short outline should be available at the time of booking. This allows well-directed preparation for the course. Literature suggestions for course preparation may be provided. Online sources would be ideal.

A simple rating as 'basic course' for residents, 'extended course' with practical content for specialists, 'vertical approach' from basic sciences to practical aspects for specialists would be a great help in determining the level of the course. The presentation of own cases, preferably in an interactive setting, should be encouraged.

Content Presentation

The content of the session should be relevant to the real world and provide a personal incentive. For instance, a contemporary literature summary should be accompanied by interactive case presentations, and include a guidance through diagnostic and therapeutic considerations. Courses should stimulate young neurologists to assess their newly acquired skills at home. Gen Yers are used to multimedia presentations including animated graphics and videos embedded in case presentations or methodological parts. Also Gen Y neurologists should get trained for usage of e-learning programs and searches on the web. Gen Y residents and neurologists will Google® and use online sources to retrieve information on rare diseases and assist diagnosis [7]. Since web content is not edited, there should be help for a critical evaluation of the quality of information. Another important basis of a teaching course includes interaction with the audience. The extent of interaction has to be defined prior to the course, i.e. number of minutes and presentation of own cases. This implicates also that the number of attendants needs to be limited.

360° Awareness

Young neurologists are confused by different options in practical neurological issues and require hands-on guidance through decision-making processes due to lack

of personal experience. Contradicting evidence might be found for guidelines (e.g. European guidelines vs. national guidelines) or different medical ideologies (evidence-based medicine vs. practical approaches like best practice guidelines). Especially 'basic courses' may put emphasis on this issue and provide strategies of best practice guidance. A recent approach is the pro/contra discussion in which two or three speakers cover different positions on a topic since it prepares the Gen Y to critically reconsider opinions and guidelines.

Organizers should be aware of the availability of local diagnostic procedures and management recommendations. In large part of Western Europe, insurance or medical systems cover diagnostic procedures and therapies of patients, whereas resources may be more restricted in the most recent member countries of the European Union. This uneven distribution may cause a backlog in medical development and the availability of new methods. This refers not only to medical equipment and resources but also to patient care and ethical issues.

Take Home Material

The average student retains only 10% of what he or she reads, but 20–30% of what he or she sees [8]. Thus, speakers have to prepare well-written manuscripts, which are rich in images including screenshots, flowcharts and

step-by-step instructions; not every PowerPoint® print-out may meet the requirements of a teaching course script. The audience is keen on electronic media for recapitulation of presentation at home [9]. Several conferences also provide mpg videos of their keynote lectures and in some cases also of their teaching courses, for free download via internet. Thus, not only written handouts but also electronic texts or media, which are platform-independent (e.g. pdf, doc or htm files), should be provided.

Conclusion

The job for educators is to understand how Gen Yers learn best and adapt to these changes [2]. Here, we illustrate what Gen Y neurologists desire from educational opportunities and present potential ideas and tools to be considered for meeting the expectations. Eventually, requirements for teaching courses are in transition and this position paper is a proposal on prevailing ideas which is at disposition for periodic adjustments.

Disclosure Statement

Drs. Walter Struhal, Laszlo Sztriha, Cristian Falup-Pecurariu and Johann Sellner are all current or past office members of the European Association of Young Neurologists and Trainees.

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