

**Neurodiab 2015 Annual Meeting**  
**The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Diabetic Neuropathy Study Group of the EASD**  
**11-13 September 2015 - Elsinore - Denmark**

**25<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting - Commemorative Session**  
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**Slide 1. Enduring friendship. A legacy for the future**

First of all, I would like to thank Henning Andersen for his invitation to prepare a commemorative publication on this the 25th anniversary of Neurodiab's foundation and annual meetings.

Now, my intention is to present this commemorative book and at the same time to briefly recall some events and moments in Neurodiab's history. I'd like to share them also from the point of view of the protagonists themselves.

**Slide 2. 25-year Neurodiab history: facts and figures**

We can view the foundation of Neurodiab as a response to some needs that had emerged in the field of diabetic neuropathy: to address the challenge of advancement in knowledge and research results, to allow for the exchange and discussion between researchers and the translation of results from basic to the clinical field, and to facilitate debate between peers from Europe and beyond.

**Slide 3. 25-year Neurodiab history: the foundation**

The idea of a study group on diabetic neuropathy of EASD grew among John Ward, Guido Menzinger, and Arnold Gries in Versailles at the end of 1989 during a meeting on diabetic neuropathy hosted by Jean-Raymond Attali.

Guido Menzinger was given the job to write an exploratory letter to Pierre Lefebvre Chairman of EASD, outlining the reasons for the request:

- “ *a successful experience with a study group on diabetic neuropathy of the Italian Society of Diabetology* ” as well as the profitable activity in other countries in the same field;
- “ *progress in understanding of neuropathy in the last decade in large measure due to European investigators* ”;
- “ *many drugs are being proposed and a forum for the evaluation of different therapeutic approaches is urgently needed* ”;
- “ *questions concerning epidemiology and regional distribution and differences, such as for painful neuropathy* ”;
- “ *the availability of new imaging techniques potentially useful in assessing the peripheral and central nervous system* ”;

“*The time is ripe to start an official study group on Neuropathy*” was the last sentence.

**Slide 4. Publications on Diabetic Neuropathy in last decades**

In reality, the number of publications and the rate of their increase had never been as high as in the 1980s with an absolute number of 1,865 and a fourfold increase compared to the 1970s.

**Slide 5. The rise in research results in Diabetic Neuropathy in Europe**

However, in Europe there had been a consistent rise in research on diabetic neuropathy already in 1970s, in particular autonomic neuropathy with innovative results achieved by many groups: PJ Watkins, DJ Ewing, JD Ward, PK Thomas, NJ Christensen, J Jakobsen, J Hilsted, G Sundkvist, B Neubauer, FA Gries and others. In the words of Arnold Gries:

“*Things changed completely when Timothy Wheeler and Peter J. Watkins published their studies on cardiac denervation in diabetes (1973). Colleagues in my team (Ivan-Josef Cicmir and others)*

*began similar studies and tried to test other autonomic functions. In 1978 we invited all the scientists we knew who had studied the brain or the neurological system in diabetic organisms to come to an international Symposium on “Aspects of Autonomic Neuropathy in Diabetes” in Düsseldorf (published in 1980 as a supplement of Hormone and Metabolic Research by Thieme-Stratton Inc., New York)”.*

#### **Slide 6. The subsequent steps towards foundation**

The time was ripe indeed. A planning meeting was held in Düsseldorf 15 December 1990 with the participation of 23 researchers with the approval of the first Executive Committee: Guido Menzinger as Chairman; Arnold Gries as Vice-Chairman; Jannik Hilsted as Secretary; John D. Ward as Member; Peter Watkins as Member, and the approval of the draft of the By-laws.

Then the formal approval of the European Diabetic Neuropathy Study Group of EASD (NEURODIAB) and its By-laws by EASD followed.

The first annual meeting was held in Cork in 1991 (in the book you'll find interesting and also funny stories about that meeting).

And that is where our story started.

#### **Slide 7. The By-laws and the Mission**

The first By-laws contained the founders' aims and the means chosen to address the aforementioned needs. These still remain Neurodiab's cornerstones: in addition to promoting knowledge of diabetic neuropathy,

- to recognize and give value to the interdisciplinary nature of diabetic neuropathy
- to introduce and safeguard a format for oral presentations with ample space for debate and the exchange of ideas and experiences;
- to preserve autonomy in the choice of subject matter under discussion;
- to guarantee the right balance between experimental and clinical presentations;
- to encourage participation from Eastern Europe.

#### **Slide 8. Neurodiab Logo**

The first logo represented the European countries where most Neurodiab participants were expected to come from.

The latest logo was changed in 2011 and acknowledges the new worldwide scenario of Neurodiab with significant contributions from countries in the West and the East and the idea of multiple fluxes and influences from different parts of Asia and the Americas.

#### **Slide 9. Neurodiab's 25-year history: achievements**

After 25 years, has it lived up to its initial project?

Events and witnesses document the production and promotion of research in the field of diabetic neuropathy through

- the creation of a vibrant network,
- a fruitful exchange between different specialties,
- the annual meetings as a fitting context to discuss innovative and preliminary results and as a forum for debate;
- paying particular attention to providing educational and financial support to young people.

#### **Slide 10. Number of Presentations at Neurodiab Annual Meetings**

In more detail, the number of presentations has increased from 20 in the Cork meeting to the more recent and stable figures of around 100.

### Slide 11. **Neurodiab: a network and a forum**

The goal of being a forum for debate and favouring the development of networks seems to have been reached according to the words of many of us:

*“From a scientific viewpoint, it is a wonderful opportunity to **network** and learn directly from the world’s leading scientists in the field.” Mitra Tavakoli*

*“The annual Neurodiab meetings were ideal for **networking** with like-minded scientists and the ideas that are generated and the collaborations that immerge have led to many publications in high quality journals.” Solomon Tesfaye*

*“Neurodiab .. an extremely valuable **forum** to bring together students and faculty from broad backgrounds - discovery research, basic science, clinical medicine and clinical research – actually interacting together in a relaxed atmosphere ..” Bruce Perkins*

*“Neurodiab has led to international **collaborations** that have helped my career tremendously...” Vera Brill*

### Slide 12. **Neurodiab: support to young people**

Actively encouraging the participation of young researchers has always been a constant for Neurodiab since its early years. even with free registration for presenters for many years (while the financial support was there).

From 1999 a Young Investigators’ Award for preclinical and clinical science was instituted and many young researchers have won these prizes (the first winners Geert Jan Biessels, Rayaz Malik, Nigel Calcutt among others have now become research leaders and tutors of a whole new generation).

### Slide 13. **The 25-year Neurodiab history: credits**

One may wonder: who made it all happen?

First of all, the support of EASD, who - from the beginning - accepted and favoured the foundation and the activities of Neurodiab. Moreover, the financial support of many Sponsors has represented an essential component of Neurodiab livelihood (we don’t have a membership fee).

### Slide 14. **The 25 year Neurodiab Executive Committees**

Secondly, where would we be without the hard work of the Neurodiab Chair Persons and of the Executive Committees?

### Slide 15. **The 2013 Neurodiab Executive Committees**

Here’s just one recent Executive Committee.

### Slide 16. **The 25 Neurodiab Annual meetings: Local Organizers**

Let’s not forget the role of Local Organizers of the annual meetings who allowed us to combine the high level of scientific content and Neurodiab’s regulations with the opportunity to enjoy wonderful places, full of arts and cultural events.

### Slide 17. **The 25 Neurodiab Annual meetings: Members**

Furthermore, annual meetings could not exist without the members and participants who took on board the spirit of Neurodiab investing personal effort and charisma.

Here’s just one photo from Ystad.

### Slide 18. **The 25 Neurodiab Annual meetings: Members**

Here’s another one from the Orvieto meeting.

Slide 19. **Neurodiab supporters: *behind every great man ...***

We cannot forget, lastly, the people who actively supported the lives and works of many major Neurodiab protagonists. *“It was a hard job being the organizer of the joint meeting of NEURODIAB and the Diabetic Foot Study Group in Balatonfüred 2002. I got enormous help from my wife.” Peter Kempler*

Slide 20. **Neurodiab supporters: *an extended family ...***

Clearly, wives, husbands and partners have been essential players in Neurodiab’s success, and one hopes they will continue to be in the future.

Slide 21. **The 25-year Neurodiab history: our ethics**

Another aspect emerges from Neurodiab’s history: the attention not only to scientific accuracy but also to an ethical approach with colleagues and society at large. So we have seen

- the mutual respect but independence from sponsors,
- the acknowledge of mentors and founders
- honouring the memory of friends we have lost,
- sharing our knowledge with society at large,
- the creation and maintenance for decades of a friendly and collaborative climate,
- the ability to appreciate beautiful places, the arts and living at close quarters.

Slide 22. **The 25-year Neurodiab history: the mentors**

Following a proposal by Peter Kempler, the Executive Committee decided to create a Lifetime Achievement Award for scientists who have significantly contributed to the development of diabetic neuropathy research. The winners of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lifetime Achievement Awards were Arnold F. Gries, Guido Menzinger, John D. Ward and Peter J. Watkins, and then PJ Dyck, David Tomlinson, Aaron Vinik and Anders Sima.

Slide 23. **Neurodiab: mentors and friends we have lost along the way**

Over the years we have lost some important mentors and some great friends.

P.K. Thomas was a dear friend for many of us and attended a number of the first Neurodiab meetings making precious, wise, and rarely predictable contributions.

Some witnesses:

*“A giant has moved on.” Peter Oats*

*“.. there is no authoritative text on diabetic neuropathy that does not pay tribute to him for his erudition and ability to wee the wood for the trees, which has made life a whole lot easier for those who presume to follow in his footsteps.” Aaron Vinik*

*“NEURODIAB will always honour his contributions for our study group.” Solomon Tesfaye*

Slide 24. **Neurodiab: mentors and friends passed away**

Göran Sündkvist passed away suddenly just 2 days after the closing of the Neurodiab Meeting in Ystad.

*“We lose a friend. We lose a colleague, who was actively involved in Neurodiab from the very first days. We express our gratitude to Göran for everything he did as a friend and as a member of our group.” Paul Valensi and Solomon Tesfaye wrote to Neurodiab Members.*

Under David Tomlinson’s suggestion, the Executive Committee named a prize lecture after Göran as an expression of a common desire to maintain and honour his memory.

Slide 25. **Neurodiab: mentors and friends passed away**

Angelika Bierhaus passed away on 15 April 2012 at the age of 50, after a strenuous battle with cancer. She devoted her whole life to research...

*“It is difficult for me to believe that we have lost two of the most talented basic scientists working in*

*this area this year.*” Andrew J.M. Boulton wrote referring also to Irina premature death. In 2012 the Neurodiab Executive Committee decided to name the Young Investigators’ Award for pre-clinical science after Angelika Bierhaus.

#### Slide 26. **Neurodiab: mentors and friends passed away**

Irina’s untimely death was terrible news for the Neurodiab community-

*“...studying diabetic neuropathy is a journey filled with challenges. Irina had the calling to follow this path. Her early death is a loss to everyone who knew her and for the present and future sufferers of diabetic neuropathy.” Teresa Jones*

*“A highly intelligent, passionate, hard working and talented scientist, Irina’s unique talents will be greatly missed by her many friends in Neurodiab and other institutions. Her strength of character in the face of adversity is an example to us all and her achievements in the field of diabetes complications will continue to inspire future young scientists,” Solomon Tesfaye*

But the words of Bruce Perkins give us an unexpected picture of a woman who deeply loved life and enjoyed it. *“...seeing Irina aggressively arguing her views on mechanisms of nerve injury by day, then seeing her Samba dancing alongside colleagues and locals in a village pub by night!”.*

#### Slide 27. **Neurodiab guidelines: Toronto Consensus Panel**

The openness of Neurodiab towards external society reached his peak with the Toronto Consensus Panel. In the words of Solomon Tesfaye:

*“... the meeting in Toronto gave a platform to address all aspects of diabetic neuropathy (diagnostic criteria, estimation of severity and treatment etc.). An international consensus panel on Diabetic Neuropathy was convened by Neurodiab and this meeting led to consensus recommendations on Diabetic Neuropathy ... This would not have been possible without Neurodiab.” Solomon Tesfaye*

#### Slide 28. **Toronto Consensus Panel Recommendations on Diabetic Neuropathy**

The Toronto Consensus produced a main publication with 6 other more specific papers that have all become mainstays in the field of diabetic neuropathy; the number of citations continues to rise revealing and testifying to their usefulness in clinical practice.

#### Slide 29. **Neurodiab: happy memories**

What can I add about friendship and beautiful places we have been lucky enough to see? Friendship may be difficult to show, we express it through sentiments, glances and handshakes, so here’s just a brief gallery of memories and photos that I hope can describe what we have experienced over the years that has created such strong and lifelong ties.

In the words of Mary Cotter (we miss her this year) *“I have happy memories of many of the meetings, they tend to merge into **one happy remembered society** that is Neurodiab.” Mary Cotter*  
*“We keep **many very fond memories** of fruitful meetings with dear friends and colleagues on wonderful locations throughout Europe, as well as here in the Netherlands.” Geert Jan Biessels & Ineke Brands*

#### Slide 30. **Neurodiab: happy memories**

*“I recall **many happy Neurodiab events around the globe...** and many happy times in different cities in Europe, such as Orvieto and Barcelona.” Vera Bril*

#### Slide 31. **Neurodiab: fond memories**

*“The **meeting venues** are always excellent and historic; my wife still forbids me from mentioning the 2008 Orvieto meeting since she could not travel with me that year.” Rick T. Dobrowsky*

Slide 32. **Neurodiab: smiles all round**

Some other snapshots of us together enjoying good food and better wine as can be seen on our faces.

Slide 33. **Neurodiab: smiles all round**

some more

Slide 34. **Neurodiab: smiles all round**

some more

Slide 35. **Neurodiab: smiles all round**

some more

Slide 36. **Neurodiab: smiles all round**

some more

Slide 37. **Neurodiab: the legacy for the future**

Bruce Perkins wrote that *“Neurodiab is a rare and magically unique enterprise, full of expertise and personality, something for us as a research and clinical community to be extremely proud of.”* Mary added that Neurodiab is *“A very successful and joyful organization that has always felt more like a family than anything else.”*

This is a demanding legacy for future Neurodiab protagonists.

Slide 38. **The painting**

Now to the book. For the cover I choose this picture “The car has passed” by an Italian painter Giacomo Balla. It gave me an idea of dynamism, of a rapid flux between what the past was and what will be in the future captured in the present.

Slide 39. **The painting**

It might represent the necessary conveying of the memory of our initial vision and ideals and subsequent achievements through an inspired and committed present to future developments and wider expectations.

Slide 40. **Acknowledgements**

Let me thank all the contributors, first of all our Chairman and EASD Chairman also an active Neurodiab member, I hope I treated your material well. I would also thank other supporters and I apologize for any mistakes or omissions. It will be up to future Neurodiab historians to fill in any gaps...

Slide 41. **Enjoy the book**

I'd like to conclude with the words of Guido Menzinger that summarize best our legacy *“In Neurodiab's 25th year the atmosphere of friendly cooperation, integrity and dedication to our basic and clinical scientific goals, which we worked for at its founding, is unchanged.”*

I trust this will continue ... and I hope you enjoy the book.