



Editorial

Looking back into the future of the neurosciences in Cameroon and Sub-Saharan Africa

It is now fifty and three years since the first Cameroonian Neuroscientist and Internist laid the foundations for the first of its kind medical training school in Njong-Melen, Yaoundé, a daring experiment that has become a track experience, inspiring neighbouring nations. Years later, another giant established cardiovascular and stroke medicine, introducing for the first time in the country, the concept of telemedicine. This flashback is essential for us to understand why the theme of the BRAIN-SCAN congress 1.5 is *Vascular Neurology in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): experiences, challenges and perspectives*. These giants of Cameroonian and African medical science are respectively non-other than the venerated Professor Gotlieb Lobe MONEKOSSO, Founding Director of CUSS and the venerated Professor Walinjom Fombad T. MUNA, Founding Editor-in-Chief of *Health Sciences and Disease*, which grew out of *The Annals of CUSS*. Brain Research Africa Initiative (BRAIN) decided to pay homage to these giants African Neuroscience through the institutionalisation of the **Monekosso-Muna BRAIN Lecture**, awarded annually since inception to the most prominent individual that has contributed to neuroscience and development in Cameroon¹.

More than half a century ago, anatomy including neuroanatomy was learned on cadavers. Today, technology has enabled us to teach these disciplines through simulation as in the pre-congress activity, through a partnership with UpSurgeOn. When we studied medicine, we did

not hear anything about stereology but today's students are served that, through a pre-congress workshop in partnership with the Turkish Society of Stereology. Furthermore, writing a scientific paper was an ordeal then as one had to labouriously go through the Index Medicus to find references of abstracts to order them and wait for months to receive them in self-addressed and stamped envelopes at the post office. Today, students can read the entire article before it is printed and there is even pre-print, allowing open peer-interaction with the manuscript before peer-review! It is hard to imagine how those scientists made it through with distinction, and it is even harder to conceive why most young students of science do not make it today, even with all the facilities they have! That is the question.

A dozen and two years when the Society of Cameroonian Neurologists (SCAN) with Brain Research Africa Initiative (BRAIN) in the background, organized the Pan African Association of Neurological Sciences (PAANS) congress in Yaoundé, Cameroon. At that time Cameroon was not yet training clinical neuroscientists (neurologists, neurosurgeons and psychiatrists, to name a few). The challenge then came from then President of the World Federation of Neurology, Professor Johan Aarli, for the Cameroonian Government to consider such a move. Two years later, training programmes in Neurology, Neurosurgery, Psychiatry and other specialties in internal medicine were started in the Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences of The University of Yaoundé I (FMBS-UYI). Currently, the clinical neuroscience programmes have produced 14 neurologists, 12 neurosurgeons and 14 psychiatrists, not counting the contributions of training of experts

of other medical and surgical specialties, not only for Cameroon but for neighbouring Nations. Certainly, these numbers are far from sufficient but we have come a long way, considering all the challenges that have not succeeded to stop the determination and resilience of both the trainers and trainees.

Four years ago, BRAIN established the concept of *BRAIN Week in Cameroon (BWC)*¹, which rapidly spread to all the 10 administrative regions of the country. BRAIN is shall ever remain grateful to the Prime Minister, Head of Government of Cameroon, H.E. Chief Dr. Joseph DION NGUTE, for accepting to be the distinguished patron of BRAIN and especially the BRAIN Week in Cameroon. In this fourth edition (2022), the triad of the vision, mission and passion has grown into the CEMAC-CEEAC Sub-Region with the participation of 5 (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon,) out of 10 countries in the activities, including the BRAIN-SCAN congress 1.5. There have been several innovations, some of which have been mentioned above and suffice it to highlight the BRAIN TRUST Tournament, bringing into competition in the neurosciences, some 15 faculties of medicine in the sub-region that were invited. This therefore sees the exponential leap from *BWC to BWC*³! Furthermore, information and communication technology has permitted this year's BWC³ edition to be hybrid, with live transmission of the sessions around the globe through a partnership with ELFA Media.

Thus, from yesteryears, here we are today in SSA, the region that has one of the highest burdens of brain disease, but paradoxically the least number of brain clinicians to provide expert care. At a time when the double burden of disease resulting from brain infections to brain non-communicable diseases rapidly increasing, we find ourselves at crossroads. We have to choose whether to continue to get distracted by silo-self-centred ambitions or to get together as the neurobiology of brain networking teaches us, to tackle the challenges ahead of us together as, **Together, Each Achieves More (TEAM)**. It is truly encouraging to observe that Cameroonian Government has steadfastly expressed the

political will to promote neuroscience and brain health. The available evidence demonstrates clearly that the promotion of quality neurology (and other clinical neurosciences) in Africa cannot be achieved without African Governments and without African Universities. In this regard, BRAIN appreciates and values its relationship with the African Union Commission as a development partner. With the new level of scientific and educational collaboration in the neurosciences with the Universities and their Faculties of Medicine of the CEMAC-CEEAC Sub-Region, and especially with the enthusiasm of the younger generations to engage in the neurosciences, demonstrated by both the quantity and quality of abstracts in this special edition of Health Sciences and Disease, one would dare to imagine a very bright future for the neurosciences in SSA. It is that future that we in BRAIN want, as we totally support the vision of the African Union Commission – vision 2063 and are committed to our specific mission of “*Promoting health for development in Africa through brain health*”.

‘There is no development without health as there is not health without brain health.’ AKN

‘If the brain does not work, the rest does not matter.’ AKN

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¹ Njamnshi AK. Migraine in Cameroon: From the painful truth to the powerful tribute. *World Neurology*, vol. 34, no.4, July/August 2019, https://worldneurologyonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/WFN_July_Aug_newsletter-1.pdf (accessed 03.10.2022).