

The First Accreditation in Neurological Specialization Training- Impressions from Istanbul University's Faculty of Medicine, Department of Neurology Accreditation Process

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Raising the quality of neurological specialization training centers and establishing standardization between European countries is one of the most important missions of European Union of Medical Specialist /European Board of Neurology (UEMS/EBN). Visitation programs have been initiated for the accreditation of the training centers for the ultimate goal of achieving the optimal performance in the diagnosis and treatment of the neurological diseases across Europe. The first one of these accreditation programs took place in Istanbul University's Faculty of Medicine, Department of Neurology. In this article, the steps involved in the UEMS/EBN visitation process will be described in detail in order to provide guidance for other training centers which may push for candidacy for accreditation in the future.

The visitation for the purpose of accrediting Istanbul University's Faculty of Medicine, Department of Neurology by UEMS/EBN took place in 23rd of May, 2012 with the participations of Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Grisold (UEMS/EBN representative) and Prof. Dr. Şerefnur Öztürk (UEMS/EBN, Turkish Medical Association [TMA] and Turkish Neurological Society [TMS] representative).

The UEMS affiliated specialization areas have initiated these visitation programs aimed at establishing national and international-level standardization in the specialist training. European Board of Neurology formed the visitation program for international neurology training accreditation under the vision and guidelines of CESMA and UEMS (1, 2, 3).

Organization of the Visitation Program

After the application from Prof. Dr. Betül Baykan, who is

responsible for the department's resident training, and the acceptance of the department to accreditation candidacy in the pre-evaluation, all of the training staff in the department were asked to fill out the electronic questionnaire forms on the UEMS/EBN website, as required by the UEMS Accreditation procedures and criteria. These forms were asked to be e-mailed in case there were any problems with the electronic system. The questionnaire asked the following: duration of the neurology specialist status, duration of the current position, number of hours/week were spent on training, total work hours/week at the hospital, whether specialty trainees have written reports, whether each trainee has personal training program, coherence of the training staff, presence of local or national guides, coming to the hospital upon the resident's request, participation of the training staff in patient and training meetings, his/her role in the training process, personal areas of interest, skill trainings, training responsibilities in the national system, supervisory status in the neurology service, quality of supervision in neurology policlinics, supervision of residents' duties, and the scientific activities and publications of the training staff. After these documents were acquired from the relevant websites, they were inspected by the visitation commission. After it was seen that the unit passes the pre-evaluation criteria, it was decided that the visitation committee would further evaluate the unit on-site. The unit was contacted and a visitation was scheduled for a suitable date.

The visitation procedure for the on-site visit was followed on the scheduled date with the participation of 2 representatives from UEMS/EBN, TMA and TMS.

The visitation started with the introductions of the representatives to the unit and opening dialogues in the morning of the visitation day. The questionnaires were given to the trainees and they were filled out in isolated rooms for 30 minutes. In the questionnaires that the residents received, the questions involved the date they started their training, whether they had an orientation meeting at the beginning of their training, whether a national training curriculum was followed, the existence of annual evaluations, weekly work hours, their general impressions on their training, their satisfaction from their training, leadership qualities of the head trainer, supervisory qualities of the training staff, their overall approach to neurological diseases, existence of guidance for specific neurological diseases, whether the patient population encompassed the full neurological disease spectrum, sufficiency of the patient admissions for establishing expertise on main disease categories, whether all consulting patients are discussed with the responsible trainer, treatment of polyclinic patients and the involvement of the trainer's in these cases, sufficiency of training meetings, participation of trainees and training staff in these meetings, participation rates in the national and international meetings, availability for receiving training outside of hospital, library and internet accessibility and their availability for scientific studies. After these questionnaires were collected, 6 randomly selected trainees were taken for personal and confidential interviews for 15 minutes.

The interviews were followed by the meetings with the department chair, assistant dean and deputy chief physicians. Some trainers were also included in the structured interviews.

In the meeting with the department chair, the duration of employment as a neurologist, the areas of specialization, the duration in the office, the organizational orientation program and schema in the training program, inter-institution collaborations, the adequacy of the present training resources,

high-priority needs to increase training quality and basic information.

During the interviews with the hospital executive staff, a general evaluation of the functioning of this training unit, the unit's inter-departmental relationships, the performance evaluation of the head trainer, participation of the unit in the general hospital activities, the level of cooperation of the unit with the other disciplines, any problems specific to the training unit, the existence of the programs oriented towards training activities and the European Union projects that are already underway in the hospital were discussed.

Later on, the training staff that was present in the hospital at that time was interviewed based on their electronic questionnaires.

The training program was evaluated to see if it was organized, systematic and comprehensive enough to foster skills and knowledge necessary for neurological specialization and the program was found satisfactory. The supervisory qualities of the training staff for the trainees were evaluated and they were also found to be satisfactory. The trainees expressed that the training program was followed in an organized and systematic way. The overall impression was described as good and excellent and the majority was reported to be positive. The supervision of the trainees were also evaluated as very good. The working hours were reported to be 60-80 and some trainees expressed the need for improvement in the polyclinic supervision as well as the betterment of the physical conditions and the building. All of the trainees reported that they had support accessing and participating in scientific studies.

Structure of the Training

It was stated that there is a training commission regulating the entirety of the training process, which enabled the rotations of all trainees between different sub-units. The trainees were seen to be gaining experience in emergency care



and polyclinics in addition to neurology since the beginning of their training. Through on-call physicians, supervision was provided every day of the week with regard to the patient interactions. The department included structured events such as regular daily ER training, basic books and AAN Continuum, special topic trainings, monthly journal clubs and seminars. Despite the intensity of the program, as a departmental rule, the trainees were encouraged to participate in the meetings and present, and take part in the scientific research. The training capability was evaluated as excellent with high access to resources (e.g. departmental library, university library, internet access) and above-standard teaching staff.

Visitation of Departmental Units

The visitation of departmental units was conducted according to a pre-arranged list. The stroke unit and the patient rooms were visited. Some laboratories (ultrasonography, electrophysiology, immunology, genetics, neurophysiology, neurosonology and neuropathology) were visited and general observations were made. Total bed count and specialized unit (such as stroke) bed count ratios were evaluated. Despite being an old building, the hospital was well equipped. The resident offices were visited and suggestions were made to increase their workspaces.

Throughout the visit, the neurology staff and the admin staff was incredibly helpful and attentive to the visitors' needs.

The report made by UEMS/EBN Visitation Committee following the visitation was evaluated and Istanbul University

Faculty of Medicine, Department of Neurology has become the first accredited neurology department in Europe with the decision made on 24th of April 2012. This accreditation, being the first of its kind for neurology, carries a great importance for European neurology as well as the national neurological society. It has been received with admiration and shortened versions of the UEMS reports on the procedure were published (4, 5, 6).

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