

International Neurosurgery Activity after 2020- Silver Linings from the Covid-19 Pandemic & Lessons from the European Association of Neurosurgical Societies (EANS)

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“Every cloud has a silver lining,” and indeed, every crisis provides opportunities for learning lessons and changing tactics. Nobody could have foreseen what happened because of the Covid-19 disease, from the unfolding outbreak stages to the epidemic, and now a global pandemic; second and possibly third waves into 2021, and 2 million deaths and 98 million confirmed infections globally as of 25th January 2021. The European Association of Neurosurgical Societies (EANS) canceled all major on-site activities in 2020; This included all three cycles of our flagship event, the residential Training Courses for Residents in Neurosurgery, as well as various hands-on courses (table 1). However, amidst the chaos, suffering, and lockdown, and the uncertainties of traveling, hotel availabilities, and quarantines, the opportunity arose to convert some events to an online version. Several organizations and societies acted along the same lines, and there has been an explosion of webinars and videoconferencing on a variety of platforms (1).

The EANS organized two important events online. The first was the “7th Annual EANS Vascular Section Meeting” (7-8th September 2020). A small-scale event previously (68 in-person attendees) was converted to a large-scale one with 1090 registrations and 409 attendees. Even though not everyone who registered attended, this still represented a 600% increase. There was also a 389% increase in the assistance countries from 19 in 2019 to 74 in 2020, surpassing all expectations (figure 1).

The second and most important event was the Annual EANS Congress, which would have taken place in Belgrade on 18-22nd October 2020, and for which the program had been ready. A surge of Covid-19 cases at the end of the summer prompted the complete conversion to a virtual event instead, with an associated re-organization of content and the delivery of the “eEANS Beyond Borders: Highlights of European Neurosurgery” on 19-21st October 2020 (figure 2) (2).

TABLE 1. The toll of Covid-19 on the hands-on training courses of EANS.

Date	Event title	City, country	Participants
2020 January 13-17	EANS Lyon Hands-On Course	Lyon, France	20
2020 January 14-15	Basic Endovascular Course for Neurosurgeons	Berlin, Germany	50
2020 January 21-22	EANS Step II Spinal Hands-On Course	Lyon, France	20
2020 June 8-9	EANS Step I Spinal Hands-On Course	Geneva, Switzerland	Cancelled
2020 June	Basic Endovascular Course for Neurosurgeons	Nijmegen, the Netherlands	Cancelled
2020 June 22-26	EANS Lyon Hands-On Course	Lyon, France	Cancelled
2020 September	EANS Step II Cranial Hands-On Course	Geneva, Switzerland	Cancelled
2020 October	EANS Advanced Course in Spinal Surgery Part II	Madrid, Spain	Cancelled
2020 November 4-8	EANS Microneurosurgery Hands-On Course	Cluj, Romania	Cancelled
2020 November 18-20	EANS Step I Cranial Hands-On Course	Brno, Czech Republic	Cancelled
2020 December 10-11	EANS White Matter Dissection Course	Tours, France	Cancelled



FIGURE 1. 7th Annual EANS Vascular Section Meeting.”

As an organization, we took the active decision to offer free participation, waiving any cost for registration. With 2527 participants from 111 countries, we could not have expected more, even from a traditional on-site event. The extraordinarily successful previous on-site annual Congress 2019 in Dublin had attracted 1825 participants from 74 countries, represented an increase of 38% in individual delegates and 50% in assistance countries. Of particular importance is that 24% of participants represented regions that would have otherwise been less likely to attend on-site; 336 from Asia, 110 from Africa, and 122 from South America.



FIGURE 2. Feedback analysis for the online Annual EANS Congress- “eEANS Beyond Borders: Highlights of European Neurosurgery.”

Can we make predictions for the future? While we certainly hope that normality will be restored, it is likely that at least in the short term and until vaccination programs are effectively rolled out globally; we will not resume the ‘previously normal’ international activities. We can, however, build on recent experiences and enhance the positive lessons and silver linings. Online events do not have the same benefits of social interaction or feedback as on-site events; however, they are more inclusive to colleagues in distant locations worldwide and with financial, social, or professional restrictions. As things stand, EANS has standardized the EANS Webinars, which will take a more regular role in the educational calendar. For future meeting planning, the EANS is organizing Congress 2021 in Hamburg with a hybrid format to attend online or in person, a new practice within the organization (3).

Another important piece of news from the EANS is the cessation of its long-term partnership with Springer publishing. Effective 1st January 2021, Acta Neurochirurgica is no longer our affiliated journal. The Spine Society of Europe (Eurospine) has also left Springer and the European Spine Journal. The opportunity arose for EANS and Eurospine to join forces in an effort for a joint venture. Our new journal Brain and Spine will hopefully be launched soon- watch this space.

Another initiative in publishing is the Journal of Global Neurosurgery. While several neurosurgery journals exist, there is a need for a niche journal in Global Health related to the burden of neurosurgical diseases. Open access journals have an essential role to play, yet their article processing charges can be prohibitive to many colleagues worldwide. The Journal of Global Neurosurgery aims to be open access and with zero costs to readers and authors; and hopefully set a new trend.

With the new year in 2021 ahead of us, we would like to express our deepest thanks to the tirelessly working staff in the EANS Administrative Office and our association management partner, Action. Our gratitude goes to all the colleagues on our Board, Sections, Committees, and Task Forces, as well as the National Society members and Individual Members. On behalf of the EANS, we wish everyone the best of health and good work for our patients.

We wish the Journal of Global Neurosurgery every success in its mission.

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