

SLEEP MEDICINE IN GERMANY

MEDICINA SPAVANJA U NJEMAČKOJ

To the Editor,

The prevalence of sleep disorders in most European countries is very high. Especially in Germany we have a lot of patients suffering from intrinsic sleep disorders as insomnia, sleep related breathing disorders, sleep related movement disorders and hypersomnia. The knowledge about sleep medicine, that means physiology, pathophysiology, diagnostics and treatment facilities of sleep disorders was rather scarce in Germany. Therefore some protagonists of Sleep Medicine founded in 1992 a scientific society, the German Sleep Society (DGSM – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schlaf-forschung und Schlafmedizin, www.dgsm.de).

From the beginning it was planned to establish a multi-disciplinary society including different specialists such as neurologists, pneumologists, psychiatrists, paediatricians, psychologists, general practitioners, ENT doctors etc. Due to this interdisciplinary approach and the growing interest in sleep medicine, the number of paying members is now in 2008 more than 2050. Parallel to the growing number of members we performed short time (30 hours) and long time (200 hours) courses in sleep medicine and introduced practical and theoretical examinations to become a so called »somnologist«, which since two years, is now an official subspeciality in Germany. You can get it now from the Chamber of Physicians. We implemented the 3 classical methods of quality assurance (structure-, process-, and outcome-quality).

Structure quality means an accreditation procedure including local visitation of the Sleep Medicine Center by 3 sleep experts. Process quality means a peer review procedure with examination of the records by a checklist of quality related process markers, supported by a manual for this checklist. Outcome quality is measured by a patient's questionnaire they answer before and two months after the stay in the Sleep Medicine Center. In Germany, 326 Sleep Medicine Centers have passed the accreditation criteria. The German Sleep Society developed guidelines and recommendations and additionally established a scientific journal, the »Somnologie« (»Somnology«) in which you can publish in German or English.

A few years ago the European Sleep Research Society (ESRS, www.esrs.eu) invited the presidents of the European National Sleep Societies to ask them for their willingness to become associated members of the ESRS. As a first step a Steering Committee (SC), which since 2007 was called Executive Committee (EC), was elected and an assembly of the National Sleep Societies (ANSS) was founded. The members of the EC are 5 sleep medicine experts from 5 different countries. They developed a guideline for the accreditation of sleep medicine centers in cooperation with the ANSS and the board of the ESRS.¹ This guideline was published two years ago. The next step was the development of a guideline for the qualification of sleep medicine specialists. This guideline can be used for medical doctors as well as for non-medical staff, working in the field of sleep medicine, such as e.g. psychologists. In the third part it is applicable for technicians and nurses. It will be published soon.

The ANSS will have its yearly meeting in May 2008 in Split, Croatia, and will discuss the next steps for promoting sleep medicine in Europe together with the national sleep societies and the ESRS.

I hope that the Croatian Sleep Society can use the experiences of the German Sleep Society for future development, that the use of the European guidelines helps you to create standardized sleep medicine and that the authorities of your country acknowledge sleep medicine as an official subspeciality in medicine.

Prof. Dr. Jürgen Fischer

Medical Director of the Clinic Norderney
Chair of the Department for Rehabilitation Science of the University of Witten/Herdecke
Past-President of the German Sleep Society
Chair of the Executive Committee of the Assembly of the National Sleep Societies in the European Sleep Research Society

REFERENCE

1. *Steering Committee of the European Sleep Research Society*. European guidelines for the accreditation of Sleep Medicine Centers. *J Sleep Res* 2006;15:231–8.