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TITLE:

The history and role of the Assembly of National Sleep Societies (ANSS) within the European Sleep Research Society (ESRS).

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Abstract

The Assembly of National Sleep Societies (ANSS) is a body within the European Sleep Research Society (ESRS) encompassing the national sleep societies (NSSs) across the European Union and beyond. The original aim of ANSS to unify the different sleep communities with different structures and levels of development and implementation remains valid until this day. Since its establishment in 2004, the ANSS has been a platform for various European collaborations. These include the establishment of the European guidelines for the accreditation of sleep medicine centers and certification of professionals in sleep

medicine (2006, 2009), standard procedures for adults in accredited sleep medicine centers in Europe (2012), the Catalogue of knowledge and skills for sleep medicine (2014), the Wake-Up bus project on sleepiness at the wheel across Europe (2015), and the creation of the Early Career Researcher Network (2013), among others. These activities have played a key role in the development and standardization of European sleep science, medicine, education and awareness. Several ongoing projects, such as the ANSS Beyond Boundaries project, continue the commitment of the ANSS in spreading sleep research and care skills in the wider European region. This article outlines the origin and milestones of the ANSS, its current activities and future perspectives.

Keywords:

ANSS, ESRS, European, assembly, sleep, society

Foundation and History of the ANSS

After the foundation of the ESRS and its first meeting in 1972, the interaction among sleep professionals in Europe increased. Based on a widely felt need for a coordinated endeavor to further develop sleep medicine, knowledge and skills in Europe at a supra-national level, it was proposed to introduce European standards for education and accreditation, as described in (Deboer et al, 2022). Furthermore, a need was perceived for the institution of a body that would stand for the interests of the sleep community in the EU. Such an international consortium was envisaged to increase the visibility of sleep science and medicine, and exert impact at a political level.

A first congregation of European national sleep societies was organised by Prof. Irene Tobler, the acting president of the ESRS. The meeting took place in Mallorca, Spain, on April 2-4, 2004. Delegates from 20 national sleep societies presented recent developments in their countries.

A change of the bylaws of the ESRS secured the establishment of an international assembly and proposed to introduce 'associate' membership in addition to the individual 'regular' membership. Each national society willing to be part of this venture would have to apply for associate membership.

To implement these new ideas, a steering committee of five individuals was appointed, consisting of presidents of a national sleep society at that time. Their primary tasks were to prepare guidelines in consensus with all societies that were interested, to coordinate the future interactions between the ESRS and national sleep societies, and to prepare an annual meeting between delegates of the ESRS Board and the presidents of national societies. The annual ANSS meeting is now typically held every year on the weekend after May 1st; the 2020 and 2021 meetings were held online due to travel restrictions during the corona pandemic.

The steering committee started working on a regular basis from 2004. At the general assembly of the ESRS in Innsbruck, September 2006, the ANSS became an official body of the ESRS. The steering committee was transformed into the executive committee of the ANSS and appointed one of its members to the ESRS board. The role and activities of the ANSS are described in the constitution and standard operational procedures of the executive committee.

The ESRS has been successful at creating a dynamic structure for interaction with European national sleep societies. This platform has enabled the development of new task forces, guidelines and common educational programs to further progress of sleep research and sleep medicine in Europe.

Table 1. Presidents of the Assembly of National Sleep Societies (ANSS).

#	ANSS Presidents	Term
1	Jurgen Fischer	2004 - 2006
2	Jurgen Fischer	2006 - 2008
3	Jurgen Fischer	2008 - 2010
4	Ludger Grote	2010 - 2012
5	Ludger Grote	2012 - 2014
6	Liborio Parrino	2014 - 2016
7	Liborio Parrino	2016 - 2018
8	Barbara Gnidovec-Stražičar	2018 - 2020
9	Ysbrand D. van der Werf	2020 - 2022
10	Ysbrand D. van der Werf (interim due to corona pandemic)	2022 - present



Figure: The annual meeting of the ANSS and the ESRS board of 2022 was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and marked the return to partially live meetings after the coronavirus pandemic. The meeting was held in hybrid form, with several attendees joining the formal part of the meeting online. Pictured are the attendees of the meeting on location, at the occasion of the reception hosted by Ljubljana's Mayor. Standing underneath the 'iron handshake' from left to right: Samson Khachatryan (AR), Béla Faludi (HU), Barbara Gnidovec – Stražišar (SLO, local organiser), Dirk Pevernagie (BE), Thomas Penzel (DE), Ysbrand van der Werf (NL), Pierre-Hervé Luppi (FR), Rainer Popovic (AU), Peter Young (DE), Tom de Boer (NL), Oana Deleanu (RO), Erna Sif Arnardottir (IS), Sarah Hartley (FR), Dimitris Dikeos (GR) and Christian Caussé (Sponsor).

Achievements

The ANSS has over the years managed to bring together driven and enthusiastic people to further pan-European projects within the scope of both the ANSS and ESRS missions. These projects serve to harmonize and standardize sleep medicine and sleep research in Europe and have led to a variety of documents and manuscripts based on the ANSS initiatives. These include the European guidelines for the accreditation of sleep medicine centers and certification of professionals in sleep medicine (2006, 2009),

Standard procedures for adults in accredited sleep medicine centers in Europe (2012), the Catalogue of knowledge and skills for sleep medicine (2014), Wake-Up bus project survey on sleepiness at the wheel across Europe, the creation of Early Career Researcher Network (2013) and the Beyond the AHI initiative (2016), among others. A brief overview of these collaborative efforts follows.

The European guidelines for the accreditation of Sleep Medicine Centres arose from the need to consolidate the requirements for sleep medicine centres across Europe (Pevernagie & STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE EUROPEAN SLEEP RESEARCH SOCIETY, 2006). This was an important step in categorizing the hierarchy of sleep facilities, the basic requirements and minimum demands they should follow. The project led over the course of a few years to the European guidelines for the certification of professionals in sleep medicine published (Pevernagie et al., 2009), followed by the Standard procedures for adults in accredited sleep medicine centres in Europe (Fischer et al., 2012). These two publications expressed the determination of the European sleep field to move towards general standardization of practice for the specialists in the field – sleep clinicians and sleep technologists/technicians alike - in gaining shared knowledge and skills for implementation in daily practice. This also paved the way for the ESRS examinations for sleep experts, leading to the Somnology exam that occurs bi-annually at the occasion of the ESRS meeting. The examinations needed to be based on a structured classification of learning topics and professional abilities to be possessed by future experts; to fill this gap one of the most important educational standards of European sleep field came about – the Catalogue of knowledge and skills for sleep medicine (Penzel et al., 2014), that has recently been revised (Penzel et al., 2021), in line with the publication of the 2nd edition of the ESRS Sleep Medicine Textbook (Bassetti, McNicholas, Paunio, & Peigneux, 2021).

An essential event for the health of the ESRS was to organize a platform for young/early-career researchers in sleep. This was strongly supported and conducted by ANSS, and in 2014 the Early Career Researcher Network (ECRN) was established. It is now an important body within ESRS serving as a networking platform for the sleep researchers.

An important role of the ANSS is to serve as a platform for the creation of innovative ideas. With the increasing demand to pay attention to excessive daytime sleepiness, especially sleep at the wheel as a growing pan-European problem, the 'Wake-Up Bus' flagship project was born. Crucial for this project was the input and dedication from Marta Gonçalves (Portugal) supported by the ANSS board at the time (2013). The Wake-Up bus started in Portugal and crossed several borders to reach Brussels, becoming one of the most known and most important projects of ANSS at the European level to date. Its success relied on the acknowledgement and understanding of the problem, its timely initiation, the idea and selection of the target. The 'Wake-Up Bus' project fulfilled all expectations, as the sleep-at-the-wheel problem was comprehensively covered in media and for EU parliament, which resulted in improving legislation on this aspect. This success cemented the role of ANSS as a standard-setting body within ESRS and led to the pursuit of projects with a similar scope.

Another important initiative springing from the ANSS was the ‘Beyond the AHI’ project. This ANSS taskforce targeted the gap in uniformity of respiratory event scoring across the ANSS member countries and aimed to impact the AASM scoring manual’s rapidly changing rules for sleep apnea patients. The results of the survey conducted among representatives of ANSS member societies showed the variability in recording and scoring respiratory sleep events across European countries (Arnardottir et al., 2016). The roots and the basis for the recently granted “Sleep Revolution” pan-European Horizon 2020 program can be found in the previous activities of the ANSS Beyond the AHI task force. Sleep Revolution was spearheaded by Dr. Erna Sif Arnardottir (Iceland), with the intention among others to improve the current situation with respiratory scoring and provide a firm scientific basis for the choices made.

Current Projects

ANSS Beyond Boundaries project

At the time of submission of this article there several projects are conducted by the ANSS. Among them is the Beyond Boundaries project (BBP) - a recently developed program being implemented after approval from the ESRS board. This is an important current activity ANSS is focused on. Its main purpose is promoting sleep medicine and sleep research in Europe, by expanding and harmonizing knowledge, skills and attitudes among sleep researchers and professionals, and advocacy among health authorities. It has been under development since 2019 by the ANSS Executive Committee (EC) and as a pilot event was held in Armenia the same year. Together with the Armenian Sleep Disorders Association and Armenian National Institute of Health (ANIH) the ANSS EC organized a round-table discussion involving local public health authorities to discuss the current issues and possible solutions to them. It was an important event which finally led to a publication of a position statement article in the official journal of ANIH (Khachatryan, Isayan, et al., 2021). This visit also helped to further shape the project’s objectives and models of implementation. Although the official launch was postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, in 2021 ANSS EC officially announced its launch with a letter to the editor article in the Journal of Sleep Research (Khachatryan, Korostovtseva, et al., 2021). Several models of BBP implementation are developed: education, practical training, advocacy and science communication. Should the reader be a representative of a European sleep society that is currently not a member of the ANSS, or lives in a country with no formed society we are inviting them to contact ANSS EC at ‘anss_ec@esrs.eu’ to discuss their interest, needs and possible implementation of the BBP in their home country.

Sleep Telemedicine in Europe

A recent project of interest is the Sleep telemedicine survey. The idea and the first survey on sleep telemedicine availability and utilization in particular countries was initiated by ANSS in 2019. However,

considering recent developments due to the coronavirus pandemic and the increased need in providing distant services within medicine and other fields, sleep telemedicine has become a much more needed and rapidly developing addition to the field (Verbraecken, 2021). Other sleep societies already developed some standards and guidelines for the regulation of telemedicine in sleep medicine (Shamim-Uzzaman et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2015). Thus, ANSS proceeded with recirculation of its sleep telemedicine survey to see the most current dynamics of telemedicine utilization in European sleep disorders practice. The results will be available by the end of 2022 to serve as a basis for development of standards in the field.

Pediatric sleep survey

Considering the gaps in knowledge of pediatric sleep and its disorders and also the fact that regulations are quite different in various countries, the ANSS is leading a focused survey on the current situation with sleep times and school times in children across Europe. These appear to be of utmost importance for children's sleep and overall health. The current initiative is in line with the ESRS perspective to harmonize and integrate the pediatric sleep medicine practice and research in Europe. The latter led to a formation of a working group on Pediatric Sleep in Sleep Medicine Committee, led by Barbara Gnidovec-Stražičar. All these changes aim to improve pediatric sleep medicine practice in Europe.

Daylight saving time in Europe

Daylight saving time (DST) and its effects on human sleep and general health has been widely discussed for decades and has received renewed interest in recent years. It appears that approaches to DST and its implementation or dismissal are very different between continents and countries. Even within the EU these are not harmonized yet, despite a continuous discussion through years and existence of an EU Commission on DST. In 2019 the ESRS together with two other chronobiology societies signed a letter to the EU Commission on DST to choose permanent standard time or 'winter time' as "the best option for public health" (*Joint Statement to the EU Commission on DST*, 2019). Many researchers and societies have highlighted the harm caused by DST (Meira e Cruz et al., 2019; Rishi et al., 2020; Roenneberg et al., 2019). The ANSS is keen to keep this issue under focus, and currently conducts a survey on DST among member NSSs to understand the situation and approaches to DST in more detail among EU and non-EU European countries.

National Sleep Society surveys

In order to keep the contact with NSSs updated, the ANSS regularly gathers the most recent information on their membership, specialist profiles and structure, recent events, their impact, etc. This is an important component of interaction with NSSs and serves as a good reference for information on current activities of the members.

Future Perspectives

The current executive committee of the ANSS remains committed to serve as a place where basic and clinical sleep research will meet sleep medicine, where every member-country would be able to contribute, where members of this most multidisciplinary medical community will have a chance to communicate, share their experience and progress. The ANSS would like to see itself as a body where novel ideas and crucial developments originate that serve to improve sleep medicine and research. With the current projects on their way, the ANSS will continue its consolidating and harmonizing role within European sleep field - diverse and in different stages of development as it may be. The ANSS aims to further establish itself as a voice of NSSs within ESRS, and at the same time will be channeling the ESRS initiatives and feedback to its members.

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