

Historical retrospectives of the EULAR Allied Health Professionals

Two decades of engagement by Ulla Nordenskiöld

Normal text One could say that it all started in Sydney 1985 at a congress organized by the International League Against Rheumatism (ILAR). Health professionals from all over the world participated in this congress, and I was working as the chairman in a workshop under the title: "Joint protection: fact or fiction". This was the first international occasion in which I was personally in contact with other allied health professionals who shared the same interest in rheumatology. During the congress, we had the opportunity to gather up an informal network meeting which involved enthusiastic professionals wanting to keep in touch also in the future.

Two years later in Athens, I presented my first abstract in a EULAR Congress. It was about "Soft wrist orthoses effects on pain and gripping power in women with rheumatoid arthritis". In the beginning, we had to send our abstracts to the same scientific review as the physicians did. When our abstracts were accepted, we presented them along with the same scientific programme. For this reason, the physicians had to listen and also take part in the discussion on our results. This was very important in order to highlight the significance of the health professionals' work; their special methods, interventions and outcomes measurements, also from the patients' perspective.

In Athens in 1987, a British nurse Vicky Stephenson arranged a new meeting for some 30 health professionals. This time, we voted on establishing our own group in EULAR for the Allied Health Professionals (AHP). The elected health professionals for the group, including Vicky Stephenson and me, were occupational therapist Ingrid Due Pedersen from Denmark, pharmacist Angelica Kruse Jensen from Norway, and social worker Willy Peters from Belgium. These members formed the first official and active working group of health professionals in EULAR. Vicky Stephenson was very determined to elevate our group into EULAR's actual Standing Committee. Ingrid Due Pedersen who already was involved in the EULAR Social League was as well a very big help in promoting the health professionals. Also from the very beginning, Fred Wyss, Executive Director of EULAR, gave valuable support to our efforts of building a Committee.

The seventh committee

The new Standing Committee of Health Professionals in Rheumatology was formally founded by EULAR in September 1989, and we became the seventh committee under the EULAR Executive Committee. Each European member country could propose a participant to the Standing Committee. In my case, the Swedish Rheumatism Association which was already a member of the EULAR Social League proposed me into the Committee. Vicky Stephenson was elected to be our first chairman. Willy Peters started as vice chairman and Ingrid Due Pedersen, Angelica Kruse Jensen and I were the first Committee members. The aims of the Committee were to disseminate information and experiences, plan and organize AHP meetings alongside with EULAR congresses, and to work towards a greater awareness of AHP's work in scientific articles and symposia. More members from other European countries were slowly participating in our AHP Meetings.

In Amsterdam in 1995, British physiotherapist Nora Price was elected the next chairman.

The following year, EULAR offered assistance to the Committee with the help of secretary Sophie Edwards from the British Society of Rheumatology. Thanks to this extra help, the Committee became more active and things began to happen. The new objectives for the committee comprised also encouraging the establishment of local AHP organizations in different countries and promoting the work of the Rheumatology

Action for Eastern Europe. There were discussions on developing special teaching courses of which I will tell more about later in this newsletter.

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