25 years of the science and treatment of disorders of the brain

ECNP

25
To follow up on this idea, a meeting was held in Copenhagen in May 1985. The rationale of a pan-European organisation was so powerful that it was decided to take it further: a European College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ECNP) would be founded. A Working Group was formed to plan the association’s inaugural scientific congress. That inaugural congress was held in Brussels in 1987. Some 500 people attended from across Europe, a remarkable turnout for a new entrant. ECNP was formally launched. The College’s constitution came two years later in Gothenburg – the same governance structure that serves ECNP today.

In 1993 the College established a permanent secretariat in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It had one room and a part-time secretary, but it was the beginnings of the ECNP Office. Permanent management meant organisational continuity, and with it financial stability. The 9th ECNP Congress in Amsterdam in 1996 was the first to be co-ordinated in-house. The College has never looked back.

ECNP’s founding goal endures: to advance the science and treatment of disorders of the brain.

The first quarter century
In March 1984, representatives of neuropsychopharmacological societies from across Europe sat down to dinner in Copenhagen to mark the 25th anniversary of the then Scandinavian Association of Psychopharmacology. European integration was in the air. The question was raised: might there be a case for a European structure, to give European neuropsychopharmacologists a platform to exchange and promote the region’s best research?
The ECNP Congress: four days of intense exchange across the spectrum of basic research, clinical neuroscience and medical practice

Today, the ECNP Congress attracts 4,000 to 7,000 participants, and has become the benchmark scientific meeting in its field. But it is not all. As well as the congress, the College now stages a wide range of meetings, educational initiatives and scientific programmes, almost all of them organised by the ECNP Office and funded by the College.

“For me, ECNP is the only truly committed interdisciplinary scientific organisation for mental health and mental disorders. There is no better place to exchange ideas and critically discuss progress”

Together, these activities and initiatives make ECNP the largest non-institutional supporter of neuropsychopharmacological research and education in Europe.

The characteristics that have defined ECNP for 25 years – its focus on high-quality research and education; excellent organisation; constructive, but independent engagement with industry; and close co-operation with national European and international organisations – continue to shape its strategic direction and guide its future.

“ECNP is my scientific home”
The ECNP universe

How it all fits together

It began with the congress, and the congress remains ECNP’s premier event, as well as the largest meeting in its field in the world. Annually, the ECNP Congress brings thousands of researchers and clinicians together from more than 100 countries to interact and share the best in pre-clinical, clinical and translational research.

But early on it was recognised that the College’s to-do list would have to extend beyond its flagship meeting. Issues such as the disparate standards of research and care between European countries, the training and preparation of young scientists and clinicians, the supply of high-quality information to the public, input into the development of robust and effective regulation all demanded attention and investment.

Promoting the best science

Promoting and disseminating outstanding science remains at the heart of the College’s mission. The ECNP journal, European Neuropsychopharmacology (ENP), was founded only three years after the College itself. ECNP’s independent Scientific Programme Committee (SPC), the keeper of the College’s scientific standards, was established in 1994, and supplemented by Scientific Advisory Panels (SAPs) in each of ECNP’s core topic areas in 2000. The SAPs also co-ordinate the annual Targeted Expert Meetings (TEMs), to explore in-depth topics of particular research relevance.
To encourage and reward exceptional contributions, the College also launched in 1989 the ECNP Neuropsychopharmacology Award for scientific achievement and in 2006 the ECNP Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding scientific service.

ECNP has also launched major projects to connect scientists and address shortfalls in Europe’s research infrastructure. In 2004 it initiated the ECNP Networks to build common databases on the main disorders of the brain. The co-operation that these networks have fostered has already yielded significant research and public health dividends. The ECNP Medicines Chest was initiated in 2011 to help clinical researchers gain access to pharmacological compounds held but unused by pharmaceutical companies. An ECNP Clinical Database has also been launched to collect patient data and make them available to scientists working in the field.

Fostering the next generation
Young scientists have always been integral to the College. Their participation at the ECNP Congress is stimulated by specially low registration fees, and every year around 150 young poster-presenters attend for free. Six of these are selected for the ECNP Fellowship Award, designed to recognise highly promising young researchers.

In 2004, ECNP held its first Workshop for Young Scientists across Europe, to encourage research careers in neuropsychopharmacology, a demonstration of the College’s commitment to young-scientist education and development. Every March the Workshop brings 100 young scientists to Nice, France, for three days of intensive interaction.

Identifying a need for better clinical training, the College launched its Schools programme. The first ECNP School of Neuropsychopharmacology was held in Oxford, UK, in 2009, with a five-day programme for 50 young clinical researchers. It has been held annually ever since.

ECNP is committed to encouraging excellence and rewarding achievement at every level.
In 2012 the model was extended to a new biennial School of Child and Adolescent Neuropsychopharmacology in Venice, Italy. Another, the School of Geriatric Neuropsychopharmacology will also be held biennially in Venice.

Plans are underway to unify the College’s educational activities into an ECNP Certificate, a neuropsychopharmacological credential that assures a recognised level of attainment across Europe.

**Stimulating standards of excellence**
Disparities between resources and access to best practices between different parts of Europe remain among the field’s key challenges in the region. To help to harmonise standards of research and treatment, the ECNP Advisory Board of National Societies was founded in 2002, with ECNP-supported symposia at national meetings.

In 1996 the ECNP Regional Meeting was launched, focused on bringing the latest research to different parts of Europe. Twice a year ECNP also organises its Seminar, offering 40-60 participants from its host country the opportunity to engage with local and international experts.

ECNP was also instrumental in encouraging the foundation of the European Accreditation Committee in CNS (EACIC) in 2000, to provide a more rigorous and focused system of continuing medical education for mental health practitioners.

"For me, ECNP means working together with the best European neuroscientists"

Education is key to our mission, with **300 young scientists trained every year**
A further initiative, the ECNP Ambassadors Programme, aims to extend the College’s reach and connect scientists and clinicians with peers at the European level.

**Engaging with the regulators**

ECNP takes an active role in liaising with Europe’s regulatory authorities to help in the formulation of practicable and effective regulatory standards for drug development. The first ECNP Consultation Meeting – initially the ECNP Consensus Meeting – was held in 1994, and has become a highly respected forum for the discussion of clinical trial guidelines.

Started in 1996, the Medicines Evaluation Board (MEB) Meeting has grown into an ongoing dialogue and annual meeting with the European Medicine Agency’s CNS Working Party.

The Taskforce on Nomenclature, a collaborative initiative with ECNP’s three sister colleges and the Union of Basic and Clinical Pharmacology (IUPHAR), to rationalise the naming conventions of psychotropic drugs, was established in 2010.

**Informing the public and patients**

Disorders of the brain suffer from misinformation and misunderstanding to an extent matched by few other treatment areas. ECNP is taking active steps to ensure policy-makers, members of the media, patients and the general public are equipped with accurate and unbiased information.

The College was instrumental in founding the European Brain Council (EBC), Europe’s leading policy advocacy organisation for disorders of the brain. The College sponsored the highly influential *Size and Burden of Mental Disorders in Europe* studies (2005 and 2011), to collect and present data on the wide prevalence and deep impact of these disorders, and help to make the case both for more research and better provision of care.

---

The ECNP journal: **EUROPEAN NEUROPSYCHOPHARMACOLOGY**

- One of world’s leading neuropsychopharmacology journals.
- Spans brain science from basic to clinical research.
- 12 issues per year.
- More than 20,000 downloads per month.
- Mobile version available for iPhone and Android smartphones.

ECNP is **the largest non-institutional supporter** of neuropsychopharmacological research and education in Europe.
In 2011 the College also held its Summit on the Future of CNS Drug Research in Europe to draw attention to the increasingly precarious nature of neuropsychiatric drug discovery in the pharmaceutical sector in Europe and to explore strategies for shoring up the region’s neuroscience research base.

“Through ECNP, I can contribute to the best neuropsychiatric educational organisation in Europe”

To address the wider, public need for high-quality information, ECNP is launching patient websites on dementia (DementiaNet.org) and depression (DepNet.org). With DepNet already available in five European languages, and with four more in the pipeline, the plan is to have most of Europe covered in the next five years. The sites are complementary to ECNP’s Talks of the Month, twenty-minute video overviews on key themes available for free on the College’s YouTube channel, and will be supplemented by the ECNP Glossary, currently being prepared, of relevant terms and concepts relating to neuropsychopharmacology and neuropsychiatric disorders.

The College also actively engages the media, in an effort to inform the public and patients, with three press conferences annually at the ECNP Congress, and assorted press activities in between. To recognise and encourage activities that destigmatise disorders of the brain, the College has founded the ECNP Media Award.

“To participate in ECNP means to advance the cause of brain health”
Neuropsychopharmacology faces critical challenges. For disorders of the brain, public research funding significantly lags behind the public health need, and private-sector funding is being comprehensively reconfigured. European researchers are increasingly thrown back on their own resources. Meanwhile, in one form or another, disorders of the brain now affect one out of three Europeans.

This environment makes the College’s mission even more important. ECNP’s role as a hub connecting laboratory discoveries with clinical applications is served with such focus by no other organisation in Europe, and it is needed now more than ever.

The priorities ahead will be to:
• Consolidate ECNP’s base, ensuring the continued scientific excellence of the ECNP Congress and meetings, and mobilising our membership for a concerted response to Europe’s scientific challenges.
• Continue to facilitate and encourage dialogue between scientists, regulators, policy-makers and industry.
• Work with all relevant stakeholders – the scientific community, government, regulators and patient groups – to ensure a secure future for European neuroscience.
• Foster young scientists and continue to renew and energise the field
• Offer guidance to the public and patients.
• Reinforce the principles of independence and operational excellence that have upheld the College for 25 years.

“For the last 25 years ECNP’s role in advancing the field has been critical; in the next 25 it will be even more so”