

Post-graduate training in Italy: what works, what doesn't...



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As the newly elected NCOs of the Italian ESRU section, we are very pleased to provide some information about the training programme for Italian urological residents and on the various activities our young association organises.

Residents Corner

Urology Training Centres in Italy

After Medical School graduation - which takes 6 years - the majority of medical doctors take a competitive state exam to be admitted to post-graduate specialist training. This exam is scheduled concurrently at the Faculties of Medicine all over Italy and consists of a multiple choice section which is identical for all institutions while the second section, depending on the school and final ranking, offers the option to deviate.

At the moment the legal position of Italian residents is ambiguous and not well defined. Average annual earnings are approximately 11,000 Euro, which ranks among the lowest resident incomes in Europe. The overall training system, considering that urology is a surgical specialty, seems inadequate and is still not clearly defined. Part of the reason for this is that the status of residents in Italy was only established by a law passed in 1991 and also the new amendments (1999), aimed at bringing the Italian training system closer to European standards, still have to be enforced.

In Italy, there are 34 post-graduate schools of urology, the first one was founded in Palermo by Prof. Pavone Jr. half a century ago. By the end of 2005, 383 urological residents were registered, of which 90 had already become neo-specialists. Every three years, the Italian government decide - based on regional and national requisition requirements - how many urological resident trainees will be accepted. Data, recently published by the 'Società Italiana di Urologia (SIU)' - which is the most influential Italian society of urology - shows a urologists / population ratio of 1:23,581, which is one of the highest in Europe. As a result, most of the graduated urologists find it hard to find employment both in the public and the private sector.

The Italian section of ESRU

This scenario may not seem too exciting, although the activities of the Italian section of ESRU over the past few years, have been very successful. Our organisation is a sub-division of the ESRU which is not yet formally recognised. However, our objective is to follow the example of the French association, and become an independent organisation. The next few months will be focused on doing everything to make it possible. As Italian NCOs in charge, we aim to enlarge the present network of Italian urological residents hoping to create a united, competent and dignified professional group, in accordance with European standards.

Every two years, Italian NCOs are elected during the National Congress of the "Società di Urologia Nuova" (SUN), a urological society particularly focussing on training for residents. For the last three years, a full one-day course on a topic selected by residents, has been held during SUN congresses. The morning session traditionally covers theoretical topics with lectures given by expert speakers, chosen by the Scientific Committee of the SUN and the NCOs. The afternoon session is devoted to a restricted number of participants using simulators. Courses of this kind form the basis for the contents of various publications which are later issued as a pocket booklet or a CD rom. The NCOs are responsible for the production and all logistics and this material is distributed to all the Italian post-graduate urological schools. The reason for doing so is to make high quality clinical and surgical data available (from "mature colleagues") to young residents. Last year, we published a leaflet on basic surgical requirements, including information on sterility, pre-surgery preparation, basic tasks and

skills and at the moment we are developing a CD rom focussing on Endoscopy of the Lower Urinary Tract.

Two "Golden Communications" sessions, on different topics, are generally also organised during the SUN congress and the winners of the best scientific presentations are awarded a grant (generously provided by Astellas) of 1,000 Euro.

Our web-page www.esrunitalia.it was launched several months ago and has already proven to be a useful source of information for the Italian residents. We take care to keep our web-page updated by implementing relevant international data. Acknowledgment of residents' needs and activities by the most important Italian societies of urology, such as the Società Italiana di Urologia (SIU), the Società Italiana di Andrologia (SIA), the Società Italiana di Urologia Oncologica (SIUro), etc is one of the goals we wish to achieve. During the recent SIU National Congress, held in Bologna in June, the ESRU meeting was part of the official Congress programme for the first time. It was a wonderful opportunity for all present to share opinions and discuss future projects and initiatives.

Another important objective is to involve as many Italian residents as possible in the European Residents Educational Programmes organised by the EAU, the EBU and the ESRU. In Italy residents are quite often not aware of these projects.

Finally, we would like to conclude by saying that our attention will definitely focus on building a bridge between Italian residents and all our international colleagues, to form strong ties which should greatly benefit all.

Urological Training in Ireland

Urological training is undergoing huge changes at present, particularly in the United Kingdom to which we, in Ireland, are allied with regards to training. The most important of these is the plan to create two Consultant Urology positions, a Consultant Urologist and a Consultant Urological Surgeon. Whereas the Surgeon will do all major operating in Oncology, Andrology and Reconstructive surgery, the Consultant Urologist will run clinics, operate to the level of TURP and investigate all patients before referring them to their Surgical colleagues for major surgery. There are no plans to appoint a Consultant Urologist in Ireland, and our training has not been changed to facilitate this, although, at present we can cross over in to the



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UK system accordingly. All Irish trainees are trained in the 'traditional' manner to the level of Consultant Urological Surgeon. At present, there is nothing to prevent a Consultant Urologist trained in the UK applying for positions in Ireland or setting up in private

practice, who will in fact not be trained to the same level as an Irish trainee or a Consultant Urological Surgeon in the UK. Clearly, the difference between these two levels of training must be highlighted and recognised. The main requirement for consultancy in Ireland is that the applicant has spent seven years in Urological practice. It is not essential (but desirable) to be enrolled on the Specialist Register - so that those who were not part of a Higher Surgical Training (HST) scheme may still apply for consultancy in Ireland. All those completing HST in Ireland may apply to be placed on the Specialist Register.

All Irish trainees are trained as Urological Surgeons, and complete their training with a broad knowledge of Urological practice and surgery. The Urological Curriculum, produced by the four Royal Colleges is

followed and formal education sessions are arranged in various formats. One hour teaching sessions are scheduled every Monday evening in the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin with video links to Galway and Limerick. This may change soon to one full day per month of educational activities, including surgical skills. A radiology based case presentation meeting is hosted once a month, with each of the training institutions presenting a number of interesting cases on their Institution's respective night. Other meetings include the Irish Society of Urology Annual scientific meeting each September and the annual Anthony Walsh Surgical Symposium. Each institution has its own in-house teaching programme in addition to the above, with general teaching sessions, radiology

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meetings and multi-disciplinary team (MDT) meetings on a weekly basis.

The training format now consists of an initial Residents scheme followed by a Higher Urological training scheme (known as a Urological Specialist Registrar). The Residency scheme, introduced this year, allows for basic surgical trainees to progress into urology in a near seamless fashion. Candidates are interviewed for the scheme and must reapply for the second year. They are assessed on a six monthly basis. They can apply for the Higher training scheme at any time but usually after two years of the Residency scheme. The Higher training scheme is presently six years in duration but time can be allowed for either clinical or research experience. The HST is an intense clinical training programme where the trainee is involved in all aspects of urological practice. In addition, the Fellowship in Urology is attempted after four years. The "completion of training certificate" is awarded once you have completed your Higher Urological Training and obtained the Urological Fellowship (FRCS(Urol)). Exposure to general surgical disciplines is taught during Basic surgical training.

Once on the Residency programme and the HST, training is only provided in a Urological setting. There are no provisions at present to rotate through other disciplines such as Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Vascular or Pelvic surgery.

There are currently five Residents positions and seven Higher Urological training posts. These are divided between Beaumont, St. James', St. Vincent's, the Adelaide and Meath and the Mater Misericordiae hospitals, all in Dublin, and the Regional hospitals in Galway and Limerick. All attachments are over a twelve month period during which a trainee may rotate between two or three Consultants within a unit. The trainee is reassessed every six months but has the opportunity to improve training within their unit during these sessions. Trainees are expected to spend one to two years outside of Dublin (in Galway or Limerick) during their training period. The current Director of training in Ireland is Mr. Thomas Lynch, Consultant Urological Surgeon in St. James' hospital, Dublin. Any enquiries should be directed to him. Alternatively, I can be emailed at davidgalvin@mac.com.