COLLABORATION

European School in Lugano seeks to share ophthalmological learning and expertise

General ophthalmology is a well-recognised medical specialisation in all European countries, but Masters’ degree programmes to provide further training and education are not yet fully developed. Consequently, ophthalmology graduates wishing to specialise need to find an institution or hospital which can offer them facilities for research or on-the-job training. Others may want to pursue a fellowship programme, but these are usually only available to US graduates.

“ESASO was founded in 2008 to address both this challenge and the specific further education needs of training and practising clinicians, drawing on the skills of colleagues worldwide and the support of various universities. It seeks to facilitate the dissemination of new and effective ophthalmological learning and expertise through a dynamic combination of in-depth exposition of topics and direct face-to-face training, where experts show students how to deal with practical situations and problems,” according to Prof Borja Corcóstegui, president of ESASO’s Scientific Council.

The school is based within the Università della Svizzera italiana (USI), Lugano Campus, Switzerland. This year the school will run a number of modules on topics including cornea, retina, cataract and refractive surgery and glaucoma. Students can choose from three types of education. Those who want to excel in their own subspecialty might only attend one module. Others who intend to go on a national career want to subscribe to the DiSSO (a diplom as Specialist Superior) and pass through all five modules. And those ophthalmologists who plan to go on an international career will subscribe to the Master’s programme which includes the DiSSO followed by a full year Fellowship at a prestigious institution or university.

In 2010, ESASO opened its campus in Asia, the continent where more than half of the world’s blind people live and one where postgraduate training is practically non-existent. “ESASO offers theoretical tuition as well as practical training, and has devised a detailed programme for the first few years featuring an expert team with recognised clinical and teaching experience. The theoretical curriculum and surgical practices can be completed at the same university and those students who finish their education will receive their degree from that university,” said Prof Corcóstegui.

Exciting initiatives

Dr Giuseppe Guarnaccia, global executive director ESASO, says the school aims to improve the clinical and surgical practice of specialists in ophthalmology in order to promote and enhance professional skills. Its objective is to provide ophthalmologists with postgraduate education and hands-on training from an internationally renowned faculty. Last year, ESASO celebrated its first graduates who received their DiSSO in ophthalmology in Lugano.

“This is a very exciting year for us,” said Dr Guarnaccia, “as we have a number of exciting new initiatives already in development. Last December we launched our first electronic newsletter eFOCUS which will be published every two months. The newsletter will offer regular updates on all of our activities. We are also looking forward to holding the 11th international AMD & Retina congress in Lisbon on November 4-5, 2011.”

Fellowships

Finally, said Dr Guarnaccia, ESASO would like to encourage ophthalmologists to take part in the ESASO Fellowship programme. This is an advanced specialist training programme in which the recipient can acquire a thorough, in-depth understanding of the specific subject and, accordingly, proficiency in the exercise of the clinical-surgical profession.

“The Fellowship consists of a grant and a research project which is supervised by Prof Stanley Chang, New York,” Dr Guarnaccia said. “Students must publish their findings. The Fellowship curricula are planned in consultation with accredited departments of ophthalmology to ensure that the prescribed objectives are achieved.

Fellows’ advanced training is conducted at one of the specialist teaching hospitals or university centres that have entered into a partnership agreement with ESASO and agreed on a training programme in a specialist branch of ophthalmology. A full list of these institutions is available on the ESASO website at: www.esaso.ch.

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