

## CAANS 5<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS: THE RENAISSANCE OF AFRICAN NEUROSURGERY

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The Continental Association of African Neurosurgical Societies (CAANS) congress was hosted by the Société Congolaise de Neurochirurgie (SCNC) under the patronage of the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), H.E. Mr Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo from the 24<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup> of November in the vibrant city of Kinshasa.

It is essential to highlight the impact of this meeting on African neurosurgery. It was the first time the CAANS congress was hosted in Central Africa. Our hosts, DRC, are a good template for building health equity for African neurosurgical patients. Over the past years, the country has grown its neurosurgical workforce from 1 to now 19 neurosurgeons, offering services to all regions within the DRC.

We had over 350 delegates from over 76 countries, many of whom were young African neurosurgeons (YAN). Close to 90% of the YAN in attendance were recipients of the “*Dr Jeff Ntalaja Young African Neurosurgeons Scholarship*”. This scholarship was awarded to the top five abstracts presented by YAN at national neurosurgical meetings across the continent. The scholarship aims to nurture research capacity building within Africa and promote the culture of neurosurgeons who are aware of the burden of disease within their communities. This approach ensures that the resources available to them are used for the maximal benefit of their population affected by neurosurgical conditions. This scholarship also ensures that YAN have equal exposure to training opportunities and teaching and builds support systems with their colleagues on the continent. Such initiatives are a step toward mitigating brain drain and exposing YAN to the opportunities available when practising in our unique and diverse continent.

The programme started with three pre-congress workshops aligned to common conditions that neurosurgeons encounter in Africa. The first workshop day opened with lectures by Prof I. Cherian, who took us through the skull base anatomy. He broke down complex topics and made them easy and relatable to young neurosurgeons. On the following day, we ran dual workshops covering Spine and microvascular anastomosis on days two and three. Abdullah Kelles moderated the microvascular anastomotic techniques session from the USA, 92 young neurosurgeons who got to practice their anastomosis technique under the microscope with a 6.0 prolene. The spine stations took the attendees through pedicle screw placements, lumbar decompression, ACDF and corpectomies. These were supervised by Prof Mehmet Zileli, Prof Alphonse Lubansu, and Prof Aderehime Haidara, amongst others. Another unique aspect of the congress was that over 22 live surgeries were performed in hospitals around Kinshasa.

The official scientific programme started on the 26<sup>th</sup> of November; due to the high calibre of abstracts, we ran three parallel sessions, which covered the diverse fields of neurosurgery. The programme exposed delegates to the clinical practice and disease burden experienced by our colleagues from different African regions. The diverse programme included round table discussions where local experts shared their experiences on various topics. The eclectic

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Fig. Depicting hands on workshops and lectures (top) and Endoscopic transsphenoidal surgery at Hospital military: Camp Tshatshi.

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The Women in Neurosurgery session gave insights into how women have helped to change the landscape in African Neurosurgery, including female pioneer neurosurgeons in their countries of origin. The senior neurosurgeons present (both male and female) could share tips with younger neurosurgeons that have helped them maintain a good work and family/life balance, which is a vital component of mental health.

We had an insightful lecture introducing Lusophone Africa (the Portuguese-speaking part of Africa) and the gains made in Neurosurgery practice in that region.

The meeting enjoyed support from several industry partners, such as Carl Zeiss, Huldamed, Brain Lab, local universities, and private hospitals. This is important because such collaborations create a network of support for neurosurgeons starting their practice to ensure they can access the right materials at competitive prices.

There were also many social activities, such as a boat ride on the majestic Congo River, where we got the opportunity to celebrate the pioneer neurosurgeons who have played a significant role in supporting the growth of our speciality within Africa. The gala dinner and visit to the National Animal Park allowed us to debrief and get to know our colleagues better.



Fig. Pictures from the Congo river cruise (top) and Safari (bottom left).

The 5th CAANS Congress was a great and rewarding experience given the depth of knowledge, friendships, and collaborations for advancing neurosurgery in Africa. The future is bright as we strengthen intracontinental networks and ensure the neurosurgical workforce has all the support and skills required to be successful. A new dawn is on the horizon for neurosurgery in Africa.