

Neurosurgery Collaboration

A Russian-American Neurosurgical Collaboration Based in St. Petersburg, Russia

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The beginning of our collaboration with American neurosurgeons coincided with the arrival of Dr. Mark McLaughlin from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to St. Petersburg. At that time, he was in residency at the neurosurgical department of Pittsburgh University under the mentorship of the noted neurosurgeon, Dr. Peter Jannetta. Dr. McLaughlin's visit inspired his department to extend an invitation to three Russian neurosurgeons in 1998; and the collaborative interchange between American and Russian neurosurgeons began.

The first fruit of our international collaborative efforts was a Russian-American neurosurgical symposium entitled "Advances in Spine Surgery: Technology and Care," which took place in May 2000. A practical training course made up of lectures devoted to the main problems encountered in spinal surgery was the centerpiece of this first meeting. During the summer of 2002, having completed his residency, Dr. McLaughlin returned to St. Petersburg, where he gave a lecture course on spinal surgery and made a significant charitable contribution to our

hospital in the form of neurosurgical equipment.

Following these events, Dr. Jannetta visited St. Petersburg on three separate occasions to participate in team surgery involving patients with trigeminal neuralgia and hemifacial spasm. Thus, by 2002 an international group of neurosurgeons doing scientific and practical work in the important field of facial pain treatment had formed in St. Petersburg. During the autumn of 2002, the Russian-American Institute of Trigeminal Neuralgia was formally established in St. Petersburg as a result of the joint efforts and voluntary dues of Russian and American neurosurgeons under the leadership of two men: the outstanding American neurosurgeon Dr. Peter Jannetta and Dr. Yuri Shulev, a professor of the St. Petersburg Medical Academy for Postgraduate Education and the head of the Neurosurgical Department of Municipal Hospital #2.

An autonomous non-profit organization, the Russian-American Institute of Trigeminal Neuralgia was founded to pursue a wide range of social, scientific, and cultural goals. The paradigm of close collaboration and long-term interaction among Russian and American surgeons treating patients with cranial neuralgias has spread to other fields of neurosurgery due to the Institute's influence. The Institute itself represents a new type of medical facility, one created

according to the principle organization by functional group, in this case specialist medical teams. Its principal research efforts are currently focused on the continued development of minimally invasive neurosurgical techniques, which aim to provide maximum medical benefit to patients at the cost of minimal surgical injury.

In November 2003, the Institute was renamed to the *International Neurogroup* to acknowledge increased interactions between the Russian and American members of the original organization and neurosurgeons living in many other countries, including Germany, Great Britain, and India. The organization has retained its autonomous nonprofit status, and at present, its staff is multidisciplinary in nature, made up of experienced neurosurgeons, neurologists, anesthesiologists, and other doctors of neurological specialties. In 2003 and 2004, two *Neurogroup* neurosurgeons successfully completed international fellowship programs in American hospitals. Beginning in 2004, St. Petersburg-based members of the *Neurogroup* have participated in the annual meetings of the North American Society of Skull Base Surgery, by presenting posters and delivering lectures.

The second Russian-American neurosurgical symposium took place in St. Petersburg in August, 2005. Entitled "Advances in Brain and Spine Surgery: Technology and Care," the symposium's scientific program included lectures and reports by leading world specialists in many fields of neurosurgery. The symposium format included plenary and special sessions. The participants included 180 neurosurgeons from Russia and several distinguished invited speakers from the United States, including

Peter Jannetta (Pittsburgh), Edward Benzel (Cleveland), Arthur Day (Boston), Richard Fessler (Chicago), Regis Haid (Atlanta), Volker Sonntag (Phoenix), Ian Kalfas (Cleveland), Hae Dong Jo (Pittsburgh), and David Adelson (Pittsburgh). Krishnamurthy Sridhar (Madras, India) and Brian Greer (Toronto, Canada) were also among the invited lecturers.

The St. Petersburg group recently launched a new collaboration with Dr. Konstantin Slavin of Chicago. In September 2006, Dr. Slavin visited St-Petersburg to participate in the centennial anniversary conference of the Russian Scientific Research Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedics. At the invitation of our neurosurgery department and the *International Neurogroup*, he delivered two reports and gave two lectures at the meeting.

Currently, the *International Neurogroup* plans to invite American neurosurgery residents to St. Petersburg for a three- to four-month training period—a collaboration that we hope will benefit both the young American doctors and their Russian colleagues.

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