

Neurology and Sleep Medicine

*For some must watch, while some must sleep:
So runs the world away.*

William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 1601

Since the clinico-pathological observations on encephalitis lethargica of von Economo (1910–1920s) and the first electroencephalographic recordings by Hans Berger (1920–1930s) normal sleep-wake functions have been shown to depend upon the integrity of the brain. Almost a century after these observations the links between sleep, brain and brain disorders remain to a great extent a mystery for science and a neglected challenge for clinical medicine.

Sleep research has a long-standing tradition in Switzerland. Prof. W. R. Hess received the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1949 for his research on the role of the diencephalon in the regulation of vegetative and sleep-wake functions. A number of researchers after him, including Prof. R. Hess, Prof. R. Koella, Prof. M. Galliard and more recently Prof. A. Borbély, Prof. I. Tobler and Prof. A. Wirz-Justice, have continued this excellence in sleep research.

Sleep medicine is a relatively young clinical discipline that arose in Europe in the 1960s and in North America in the 1970s. In Switzerland Prof. Ch. Hess and Prof. M. Guggler were pioneers in this field performing sleep recordings since 1982 and shortly thereafter opening the first sleep centre that offered a multi-disciplinary management of sleep-wake disorders.

In 1991 basic scientists and clinicians joined to found the Swiss Society of Sleep Research,

Sleep Medicine and Chronobiology (SGSSC) which now has over 230 members. Following the definition of criteria for the accreditation of sleep centres (Schweiz Ärztezeitung/Bull Méd Suisses 1998;79:2603–14 and 2000;81:886–8), a total of 20 sleep centres have been certified in our country (www.sleep-swiss.ch).

This special issue of the Swiss Archives of Neurology and Psychiatry is thought as a companion to the Joint Meeting of the Swiss Neurological Society and the SGSSC (Zurich, November 20–22, 2003). Thirty authors from six countries representing the major disciplines involved in sleep medicine (neurologists, pulmonologists, psychiatrists, PhDs) have contributed to this issue with reviews on the more common sleep-wake disorders, sleep-wake disorders related to neurological diseases and such new fields as sleep genetics and sleep neuroimaging.

These articles were written with great enthusiasm and expertise which hopefully make the reader enter the fascinating and challenging world of sleep and its disorders. The patient will be grateful and the reader's intellectual curiosity not be disappointed.

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