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 AWARDEE REPORT FORM

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| NAME | DEARBHLA CULLINANE |
| TWITTER HANDLE\* *optional* | @DearbhlaCulli |
| UNIVERSITY | TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN |
| NAME OF AWARD | SYMINGTON BEQUEST FUND 2023/24 ROUND 3 |
| PURPOSE OF AWARD *conference/event attended/organised (full name) with city and dates.* |
| To present at the 5th International Conference on Functional Neurology Disorder, organised by the Functional Neurological Disorder Society, in Verona Italy, June 8th-11th 2024. |
| REPORT: What were your anticipated benefits?*Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* |
| The 5th International Conference on Functional Neurological Disorder (FND) brought together a variety of multidisciplinary clinicians, allied healthcare professionals, academics, and researchers to discuss a disorder that has seen a significant increase in global attention over the past two decades. Historically, FND, previously known as *conversion disorder*, has been placed between the pendulum of neurology and psychiatry leading to a widespread lack of professional ownership over these patients, limited research, and substandard care. This conference aimed to address this gap by bringing like-minded individuals together to debate theories and constructs in the field, highlight research gaps, and lessen the divide between ‘mind’ and ‘brain’. One notable highlight was the inaugural pre-conference Education and Training Day for FND providers with four dedicated training tracks: neurological care, psychiatric care, paediatric care, and rehabilitation care. It was my anticipation that this training day would provide me with a concrete foundation into the pedagogical efforts currently being made to educate FND providers and how some of this knowledge could be translated into a medical student context. Moreover, I anticipated the conference to be an excellent opportunity to showcase my current work and make connections with other motivated researchers and clinicians in both Ireland and internationally.   |
| COMMENTS: Describe your experience at the conference / lab visit / course / seminar/ event.*Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* |
| Conference delegates had the choice of attending either the three-day conference alone or to opt to attend a supplementary pre-conference training day. I chose the latter and was greeted at the conference venue, Palazzo della Gran Gaurdia in Verona, on a warm and sunny Saturday morning. The Palazzo was exceptionally placed in the centre of Verona, overlooking the Piazza Bra and the famous Roman Arena. The education day was primarily clinician-oriented. The day opened with a short welcome address after which we quickly dived directly into the importance of history taking and clinical observation before learning to distinguish between various semiological signs. We learned about the importance of patient validation, about the necessity for bridging models between diagnosis and treatment, and about significant differences and similarities between paediatric and adult patient populations. After a lengthy discussion, delegates were separated out into their chosen tracks for workshop-based learning. I chose the neurological care track. This workshop began with dyad role-plays of doctor-patient consultations where all delegates practised delivering a diagnosis of FND. The central premise was to help the patient come to a shared understanding of their disorder without imposing outdated psychiatric explanations onto their symptoms. We then moved on from diagnosis to triage. Using a traffic light system, we navigated through a series of case examples and discussed the “rehability” of several complicated cases. This helped delegates reach a mutual understanding of why some patients respond to treatment and why some do not, and importantly, when to prescribe treatment when resources are limited. The training day concluded by bringing all training tracks back together. A central theme in the afternoon session was to give treating physicians confidence to treat FND patients with their existing skills. The conference continued for three further days with a diverse range of talks and poster presentations leading from mechanism to treatment, as well as phenomenology and epidemiology studies across all four phenotypes of FND. On days two and three, a significant emphasis was placed on comorbidity in FND with multidisciplinary experts exemplifying their knowledge on migraine, dizziness, and cognitive impairment. |
| REPORT: In relation to skills, what were the most important things you gained? *(does not apply to equipment grant.* For public engagement/outreach awards what did your audience gain and how did you evaluate success?*Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* |
| This was not only my first international conference, but I also proudly attended the event alone. Consequently, improving my networking skills was one of my primary objectives. Research in FND has just been established in Ireland, I was therefore pleasantly surprised to network with some passionate rehabilitation therapists working in Ireland, as well as several clinicians from various parts of the world. I communicated with multidisciplinary specialists who all appear to approach FND research and treatment from different perspectives. Such interactions required adaptability and appropriate handling of questions but also provided opportunities to practise asking questions in an insightful and purposeful way. As I near the end of my first year as a PhD student, it was greatly educational to observe a myriad of different presentation approaches from both conference speakers and poster presenters. Presenting my poster to a range of like-minded individuals helped me to identify my strengths and weaknesses. In particular, I learned how to become more comfortable and competent presenting my work in a busy and dynamic environment, something which is entirely different from a quiet lecture-based scenario. The poster sessions were vibrant and energetic, with a consistent hum of conversations throughout the hall. Surprisingly, the setting was more informal than I anticipated, yet it maintained a high degree of professionalism that sparked fresh ideas and collaborations. I welcome more opportunities to challenge my presentation style in the future. Additionally, attending various special interest sessions provided me with valuable insights into the latest research methods and technologies in the field of FND. One session on advanced imaging techniques was particularly instructive and has encouraged me to learn more about these methods and potentially incorporate them into my own research. |
| REPORT: How do you think you will put this learning experience into practice in the future? For public engagement/outreach awards how with the materials/knowledge generated by this activity be used in the future?*Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* |
| Attending this conference has inspired me to continue my research in FND. Learning from various speakers and understanding both the commonalities and disputes in their views, I can see that clinicians and researchers are starting to move towards a shared understanding of the aetiology and potential mechanisms of this disorder. Researchers need to continue bridging the gaps between neurology and psychiatry and start seeing patients holistically. Inspired by the enhancement of neuroanatomical education, we need to motivate our students to choose careers in neurology or neuroscience and not be frightened by the burden and generational continuation of neurophobia. I will use the knowledge I gained from this experience to continue building medical students’ knowledge of FND through a neuroanatomical lens. This approach aims not to oversimplify FND as merely a disorder of ‘structure’, but rather to elucidate its complexities by aligning it with current curricular concepts that facilitate comprehension. For me, attendance at this conference solidified the need for improved and targeted education for FND. I will continue my work in neuroanatomical dissection to map the networks hypothesised to be implicated in FND and look forward to integrating these into the virtual learning environment for our students.  |
| Data Protection/GDPR: I consent to the data included in this submission being collected, processed and stored by the Anatomical Society. Answer YES or NO in the Box below |
| YES |
| Graphical Images: If you include graphical images you must obtain consent from people appearing in any photos and confirm that you have consent. A consent statement from you must accompany each report if relevant. A short narrative should accompany the image. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below |
| YES, see link to post on X [(2) Dearbhla Cullinane on X: "It was exciting to present at the 5th International Conference on #FND in Verona this week. An even greater privilege to be amongst so many leaders in this field - to listen and learn from different perspectives and to network with clinicians and other motivated researchers 1/2 https://t.co/ndhkcHWXHW" / X](https://x.com/DearbhlaCulli/status/1800899368817668201)  |
| Copyright: If you submit images you must either own the copyright to the image or have gained the explicit permission of the copyright holder for the image to be submitted as part of the report for upload to the Society’s website, Newsletter, social media and so forth. A copyright statement must accompany each report if relevant. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below |
| N/A |
| SIGNATURE | DEARBHLA CULLINANE | DATE | 20.06.2024 |

*If submitted electronically, a type-written name is acceptable in place of a hand-written signature*

*File: AS-Award-Report-Form-171023 – International Conference*

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