

Advanced Training in Retinal Diseases

The European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology offers young physicians an interdisciplinary and international postgraduate training experience.

BY STANISLAO RIZZO, MD; AND GIUSEPPE GUARNACCIA, MD

The European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology (ESASO), hosted by the Università della Svizzera italiana, in Lugano, Switzerland, was founded to offer a master's degree program in the ophthalmic subspecialties, enabling new specialists to further improve their knowledge. The school strives to provide the highest teaching standards and the best postgraduate training in ophthalmology available in Europe to young doctors from all over the world. ESASO comprises professors of international standing and holds active cooperation arrangements with important treatment and research centers, including centers in Barcelona, Spain; Munich, Germany; Vienna, Austria; Milan and Pisa, Italy; and Paris, France. Borja Corcóstegui, MD, is the President of the ESASO Scientific Council (Figure 1).

The program, which was made possible in part due to contributions from the Department of Education, Culture, and Sport of the Canton of Ticino, Switzerland, the City of Lugano, Switzerland, the Università della Svizzera italiana, and the Swiss Society of Ophthalmology, was conceived in response to the need for effective postgraduate teaching and training for young ophthalmologists in Europe. The project is also supported by highly acclaimed faculty who offer their experience and knowledge.

The programs of study include cornea, refractive, glaucoma, cataract, vitreoretinal pathologies, uveitis, oculoplasty, pediatric ophthalmology, and strabismus.

ESASO, founded 2 years ago, had a successful start. This year, more than 140 specialists from various nations have attended our programs.



Figure 1. Second Module A (2010). First row from left to right: Giuseppe Guarnaccia, MD; Borja Corcóstegui, MD; Peter Kroll, MD; and Paul E. Tornambe, MD.

MISSION

We have successfully created a unique environment where we can meet the demands of young specialists that may not be met during their surgical training or in the office. The environment in which most surgical training is conducted is frenetic. Due to the large number of patients, there is little time between cases for surgeons to work with residents. Over the long term, this atmosphere does not help to educate students. Therefore, the mission of ESASO is to create a unique environment that accommodates the needs of our postgraduates. We accomplish this by offering interesting, efficient, and interactive courses; by providing training with respect to market opportunities; and by upholding ESASO's ultimate mission to emphasize the



Figure 2. Posterior segment training at ESASO combines theoretical training with wet labs.

value of human life and the importance of developing solidarity with patients. ESASO not only teaches young surgeons how to perform high level ocular surgery but also encourages them to share the competencies that they gain at ESASO with other specialists.

OBJECTIVES

ESASO employs a teaching staff of prominent ophthalmologists from all over the world. Our faculty members are well known not only for their scientific qualifications but also for their capacity for human understanding. We believe that we are equipped to educate postgraduates in the best diagnostic and therapeutic approaches for a variety of ocular pathologies. Our aim is to create international relationships and connections among the best ophthalmologists and those who wish to become one of the best. We strive to spread best practices to developing countries by encouraging ophthalmologists from these regions to attend ESASO.

POSTERIOR SEGMENT COURSE

Two modules are dedicated to the posterior segment course due to the importance and enormous range of vitreoretinal pathologies. The course is divided into 2 weeks. The first week focuses extensively on vitreoretinal pathologies of mainly medical interest, such as vascular and degenerative retinal pathologies. The second week is dedicated to retinal pathologies of mainly surgical interest, such as rhegmatogenous retinal detachment, primary and secondary macular hole, and macular epiretinal membranes. Both clinical and surgical aspects are emphasized throughout the course.

In general, the course aims to provide young specialists with the most up-to-date knowledge about pathologies from a diagnostic and therapeutic point of view. Today's most avant-garde vitreoretinal diagnostic and surgical

techniques are presented and explained via videos.

Extensive wet lab sessions are organized to meet the practical demands of performing retinal surgery using complex vitrectomy systems. The wet lab combines theoretical and practical aspects of modern vitrectomy systems and the ground rules for a correct, efficacious, and safe surgical procedure (Figure 2). The concepts of flow, aspiration, and cut rate are explained. Students use the most up-to-date vitrectors and come to understand both their functioning and their response to sudden flow and aspiration changes.

The principal feature of this course—and of all ESASO courses—is interaction. The curriculum encourages interaction among students and professors in the classrooms and wet labs. Often, students and professors have lunch and dinner together, providing students with access to experts and creating a fruitful training experience.

All of this training takes place under the guidance of world-famous vitreoretinal surgeons who are eager to offer their experience and knowledge to students. ESASO provides an important opportunity for young specialists, who face this world with such enthusiasm, to improve their knowledge and attitudes in ophthalmology.

FUTURE PLANS

In 2011, ESASO will offer some doctors awarded the Diploma of Specialist Superior in Ophthalmology (DiSSO) a 1-year fellowship with financial support to selected centers.

To expand our formative program, ESASO is also preparing to open an ESASO campus in Asia next year.

For information about ESASO, including admission requirements and the curriculum, please visit www.esaso.ch. ■

Stanislao Rizzo, MD, is Chairman of U.O. Chirurgia Oftalmica, Azienda Ospedaliero Universitaria Pisana, Pisa, Italy, and Professor at the European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. He is a Retina Today Editorial Board member. Dr. Rizzo states that he has no financial interest in the material presented in this article. He may be reached at e-mail: stanislao.rizzo@gmail.com.



Giuseppe Guarnaccia, MD, is the Executive Director of the European School for Advanced Studies in Ophthalmology, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland. He is also Chairman of the Ophthalmology Unit Ospedale B.M.M. Reggio Calabria, Italy. Dr. Guarnaccia states that he has no financial interest in the material presented in this article. He may be reached at tel: +41 58 666 46 29; fax: +41 58 666 46 19; e-mail: info@esaso.ch.

