France / AFGS : What happened in 2010

The Symposium which took place in October 2009 in Brest gave us the opportunity to meet people from associations we had never heard of before. Cooperation, exchange of information and newsletters, even friendship started there. One year after, the International Sjögren’s Network ISN is still a very young baby, but no longer an infant.

Need an example? At the end of November we were contacted by a member of the Dutch University of Utrecht to be included into an international survey on the lack of understanding experienced by people suffering from rheumatic diseases. The Dutch Sjögren association participates and no doubt, it is through them that the AFGS was asked. It gives our members the possibility to take part, for the first time, in the life of the AFGS, in an international, multilingual, multipathology survey, on the Web!

In 2010, the AFGS celebrated its 20th birthday and we could say « Thank you » to the few persons who were bold enough to launch this adventure. A booklet was printed to cover the past achievements. These people were a handful, we are now more than 2500 members! But how many more unknown patients and sufferers...

Some members of the AFGS from abroad also feel like pioneers, and in Morocco a new SS association is being created. They are a small group, determined, and willing to help the patients in a country less familiar than France with such organizations as patients associations. We are trying to give them help and support, whishing them to grow and gather plenty of members.

In France, 2010 was not only a year of remembering what we used to be 20 years ago, but also saw innovations: we started providing a personalized welcome (on demand) to new members, thinking that joining an association is often a difficult decision to take for patients. Even if their expectations are high they are not always clearly formulated, especially in front of such a strange illness as ours.

Knowing that internet is now a part of many more members' lives, we now offer them not only the possibility to visit our site but also to receive some information, live, directly at home on their PC.

For many years, we had been able to hold our annual meetings and medical conferences in one of the rooms of the French Senate! This will end, and we had to find a bigger room for 2011, with all the proper facilities, in Paris, and within our financial means. A big challenge and a successful search! In May, we'll welcome more than 500 people in the conference hall of the Institut Pasteur! You'll hear about it next year...

Finally, the AFGS has always actively supported research and we are proud that last year we could award grants to 2 young researchers. We told you about it (and them) at the time. We were also approached by members of our « regular » researchers, who faithfully support us and work with their teams to better understand SS: 4 of them had projects to which we gave a significant financial support. Though we have no public help and what we can give comes from donations and members’ participation, we insist on being as active as we can, so 2010 was a very fruitful year in this respect. And we are glad to do it.

For the first time, one of these researchers was also awarded financial support from the “Fondation pour la Recherche Médicale”, one of the best and most famous French foundations, expressly
created to support medical research, on all kinds of pathologies, so that the competition between the projects is very high.

To be continued next year...
AFGS Association Française du Gougerot-Sjögren et des Syndromes Secs