The first 25 years of the EBMT Nurses Group

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Introduction

To celebrate the 25th meeting of the EBMT Nurses Group (EBMT NG) I was invited by the EBMT Nurses organising committee to present an oral presentation of the History of the EBMT nurses group. This was a great honour, especially as there are so many experienced European nurses whom they could have asked.

I changed the title of the presentation from “The history of EBMT Nurses group” as this sounded as if the group did not exist anymore to “The first 25 years of the EBMT Nurses Group” because 480 nurses had registered for the meeting. This meant that the group was alive and kicking.

To look at what the EBMTNG has achieved, you have to look back over the past 27 years. Therefore it would be impossible to mention everything in this article.

In February 1983 two nurses, Celeste Dye and Yvonne Hagen from Leiden University Hospital, The Netherlands, sent a letter to nurses working in European Bone Marrow Transplant (BMT) Units after they had attended the 8th EBMT meeting in Obertsdorf, Germany. This first letter stated:

“….The one thing that was impressed upon us was the need for some sort of contact between the nurses in European BMT centers. We have come up with the idea to start an organisation of European BMT nurses. In this way, we could exchange information to help in the nursing care of all our patients. Periodically, we could exchange suggestions or solution over certain specific problems. This could also be a way of reporting studies being done by nurses in other centers.....Enclosed is a questionnaire.”

There were 22 responses from 11 countries and the results of the questionnaire formed the basis for the first programme. The most striking response being the length of stay post transplant – 40 days.

A second letter was sent by Celeste, with support of the EBMT medical committee, announcing the 1st meeting of the EBMTNG to be held on 30th January 1985, Bad Hofgastein, Austria. A registration fee for nurse would not be required and there would be a drug company sponsored dinner. Nurses could attend the medical meeting on the two previous days.

The 1st programme contained oral presentations on:

Mismatch transplants,
GvHD,
Cyclosporin A
Gut decontamination
Advantages and disadvantages of Hickman line catheters and portacaths,
Nutrition in isolation
Child isolator
Psychological aspects of BMT patients
Portrait of a BMT Nurse

The meeting was so successful that the same committee; Celeste Eggink - President (Leiden), Linda Ward - Vice President (London) and Jean Edwards - Secretary (London) organised a second meeting the following year.
**Venue Changes**

The conference venue for the 2nd meeting in Cormayuer, Italy only had one lecture theatre, therefore the nurses meeting was held in the local school. The desks and chairs were slightly on the small side and the sun shone very brightly through the large windows. This did not stop the 32 nurses attending the meeting from learning from each other. There were no posters, no drug company stands and the medical programme was organised around skiing. The nurses programme being two full days.

![The conference venue for the 2nd EBMT-NG Meeting in Cormayuer, Italy in 1986](image)

As the medical and nursing attendance at these meetings increased the ski resort facilities were not sufficient, therefore the first non-ski meeting was held in The Hague in 1990. This brought new challenges. Instead of learning to ski in your free time, many of the participants decided that the easiest way to travel around the Hague, was to cycle. Do as the Dutch do! There were many stories of near misses with motorised vehicles and pedestrians as non-Dutch nurses could not find the breaks on the bicycle (pedalling backwards brought the brakes into action). Nurses attending this conference came from New Zealand, Australia and USA, as well as Europe.

Ski clothes were no longer required in 1990, it was June and very hot. Stockholm in 1992, the 8th nurses meeting, brought sleepless nights. Not because of all the socialising but because it never got dark and the dustbin collectors and road sweepers worked during the night!! The 1994 meeting was held in Harrogate, England, in March. The free gift that all participants received was an umbrella. Not sure why they choose this wonderful spa town of Harrogate in March. It is always very windy and very wet. The town was littered with broken umbrellas by the end of the first day!

These larger and newer conference centres did however provide all the modern equipment required. Committee members were no long seen retrieving equipment e.g. such as the speakers’ lectern, that had been placed in the nurses meeting room the night before then disappeared in the morning. It was found in one of the medical meeting rooms and brought back.

**Networking**

Although all the meetings had excellent programmes, nurses also learnt so much from each other. This was often done outside of the conference such as on the ski slopes or over a meal. As the conference became more successful it became impossible to meet everyone. Be warned those male participants who attend such meetings... there have been at least two romances of which resulted in marriage (the Dutch again!)
Change in structure of the programme

To organize any nurses’ educational programme is always difficult, especially with a wide range of experience. This was pointed out in a letter from nurses working in England after the 1987 meeting. “…good conference but presentations geared to inexperienced nurses. More experience nurse happy to speak but will attend the medical sessions…” The structure of the meeting has evolved with the opportunity for medical and nursing staff attending the sessions they thought interesting. The nurses’ programme has evolved as illustrated below:

1985 - Oral presentations
1987 - Introduction of Roundtable discussions and Poster presentation
1999 - Early morning educational sessions
2005 - Pre conference Educational Study Day
2007 - Patient & Family Day and family

Changing role of the committee

Between 1985 and 1991 the committee members arranged the programme for the following year, abstract selection was done, at home by reading hard copies and communication was by telephone and fax machine. Email became more available in 1991 When Joachim Larsen, from Sweden, became president and he dragged the committee into the modern age of technology.

Finances

At the 3rd nurses annual general meeting in 1987, Interlaken, a request to raise money had been received from the Medical Board of EBMT. The hosting counties were asked to raise funds for the meeting and EBMT would then try and pay the difference. A nurses’ registration fee for 1988 was to be introduced. This included the conference dinner (50 Euros compared with €210-€340 in 2009). In 1988, at the 4th Nurses meeting in Chamonix, the medical board agreed they would now only support one nurses’ committee meeting per year, therefore an individual nurse membership fee was introduced. Since then there have been several changes in the nurses membership and now each centre (CIC) can include nurses in their centre membership.
Research

If the EBMTNG was to remain recognised by the EBMT medical board it was essential that the group made some progress with research, on a small scale, as suggested by Celeste in her first letter. The EBMTNG committee asked its members to inform them of small projects that were being performed in their units. During the same year nursing research topics appeared on the 1988 programme. Maggie Evans from London presented Quality of life & Late Effects and became our first research contact person offering help and advice to those who wanted to perform research. Following this appointment other members took on the role and eventually in 1996 a Research Committee was established. Research changed from evidence of Quality of Life issues to developing evidenced based practice of practical issues such as mucositis.

Communications

After the 1st meeting all presenters were asked to hand in a paper copy of their presentation to the committee. A document called the “Proceedings” was then produced and sent to the participants. This was used as an educational tool. In 1985 the first national nurse EBMTNG was formed (another Dutch first). In 1986, to improve communications in each European country, a contact person was identified, who cascaded information down to local transplant units. The document known as “The Proceedings” became the Newsletter and this was produced until 1992, when the EBMT Nurses Journal took over. The journal was produced for six years. From 1998 the EBMT Newsletter included a section for the EBMTNG. This newsletter became an electronic document, when the EBMT web site was established in 1999.

The last 25 years has seen many changes, although there has been a theme since the beginning. The Dutch nurses organised the first meeting, they formed the first national group, and two male Dutch nurse met and married non Dutch BMT nurses. I do hope that the Dutch nurses will continue to be involved and I am sure we all wonder how the EBMTNG will continue to evolve over the next 25 years.