



The “Michael Foundation”—A foundation against epilepsy

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“Foundations do not fall from Heaven; they all have their story to tell”—this is how Prof. Janz put it in his welcoming speech at the 50th anniversary celebration of the Michael Foundation, and it is very true.

The Michael Foundation was founded in 1962 by Dr. Fritz Harzendorf, a well-known journalist, editor, and fervent opponent of the Nazi regime in Germany. His son Michael suffered from epilepsy since his early childhood, and Dr. Harzendorf searched for a proper treatment for his son.

The treatment of epilepsy in Germany during the early years after the war—Michael was born in 1942—was rather poor, but Dr. Harzendorf was lucky to find the right place and the right person for Michael’s treatment: Prof. Dieter Janz at the Heidelberg clinic for epilepsy. And the idea was born to create a foundation to promote scientific research on treatment methods, the causes of seizures, and the fight against individual and social effects of epileptic diseases.

In 1962, Dr. Harzendorf sold his share of a newspaper and donated part of the proceeds as seed money for a Foundation named after his son—the Michael Foundation—whose activities were designed to concentrate on research, training, epilepsy care, and information.

RESEARCH

Since 1963, the Michael Foundation biennially awards the *Michael Prize*—one of the most prestigious international awards for contributions to basic scientific and clinical research in epileptology. The list of winners of the Michael Prize is a “Who’s Who” of epilepsy research worldwide; the prize is awarded at the International Epilepsy Congress. Also biennially, the Michael Foundation organizes a meeting of the winners of the Michael Prize, the *Michael Forum*, where former winners of the prize can interact and share their research and ideas in a very open and informal way.



Michael Harzendorf, son of the founder of the Michael Foundation.

EXTENSIVE TRAINING, EDUCATION, AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Starting in 1963 with scholarships for neurologists and neuropediatricians for training in epileptology in Germany, the Michael Foundation made an important contribution to the promotion of epileptology in Germany; later the program was extended to other countries. More than 60 young doctors have benefited from this training program. Training and scholarships have later also been provided to other health care professionals: social workers, nurses, and personnel in epilepsy centers; they receive special training in epileptology, partly financed by the Michael Foundation, at the Bethel Department of Training and Counseling. Since 1988, the Michael Foundation has organized trainings in epileptology for doctors who want to upgrade their knowledge about epilepsy: the “Practical Seminar for Epilepsy” in Gargnano at Lake Garda in Italy. Scholarships for young doctors (up to age 32 years) will be provided in 2014 for this seminar.

The most recent scholarship program is the Michael Foundation’s contribution to the *VIREPA distant education*

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STIFTUNG MICHAEL
eine Stiftung für Epilepsie





Dr. Fritz Harzendorf, journalist and editor of a newspaper (the “Neue Wuerttembergische Zeitung”, NWZ, in Goeppingen, South of Germany) founder of the Michael Foundation.



Dr. Heinz Buehler, Managing Director of the Michael Foundation, son-in-law of Dr. Harzendorf.

courses in epileptology, which provides financial support to younger applicants from European countries.

EPILEPSY CARE

The lack of a sufficient number of specialized centers for epilepsy care in Germany in the early 1960s clearly needed to be dealt with. Thanks largely to the foundation, its training program for young doctors and support personnel in epileptology, and its vision of a network of specialized epilepsy centers all over Germany, the number of centers grew from two in the early 1960s to about 175 today, including counseling provided by competent social, psychological, and pedagogical teams in clinics and hospitals. The Michael Foundation was the first organization to publish and disseminate maps of epilepsy centers and self-help groups in Germany; it funded many start-ups of epilepsy self-help organizations; it is cooperating and partially funding activities of the “Social Work with Epilepsy Society.”

INFORMATION ON EPILEPSY

The Michael Foundation attaches great importance to the publication and dissemination of information on epilepsy, to the fight against still widely existing prejudices and ignorance about the illness, its consequences, and treatment possibilities. Information material, including films, is provided to the public, schools, self-help organizations, and individuals requesting information on specific questions, such as: “epilepsy in school-children,” “epilepsy and sports,” “epilepsy and drivers’ license,” “epilepsy and pregnancy,” and “epilepsy and social rehabilitation”—just to mention some of the information material published in German language.

DIRECTION AND PLANS

The Michael Foundation has contributed greatly to the development of epileptology in Germany. The establishment of epilepsy centers, education and training in epileptology for doctors and nonmedical personnel, the development of epilepsy care and information or the strengthening of the epilepsy self-help movement in Germany are to a great extent due to the foundation’s initiatives and financial support. Our aim is to continue being the initiator and promoter of ideas and actions to further epileptology both nationally and internationally. The foundation is currently initiating a *focused fellowship program*, which offers opportunities for young researchers from European countries to familiarize themselves in German epilepsy centers with state-of-the-art clinical procedures, electroencephalography (EEG) diagnostics, epilepsy-related imaging, or to participate in research projects. In addition, the foundation is planning to launch an initiative similar to one in the 1980s: to get together a group of prominent German epileptologists from all relevant sectors to discuss the present situation of epileptology in Germany, to define areas of special importance and of actions to be taken in order to make German epileptology more visible both in Germany and internationally.

MICHAEL FOUNDATION ORGANIZATION

The foundation is a private nonprofit organization without any government funding, funded entirely by income from its basic capital investment, from legacies, and donations—which are very welcome; it is legally based in Heidelberg; its office is located in Bonn. Its manager and a part-time secretary are working under the direction of a board of trustees with internationally well-known experts in epileptology; Chair: Professor Bettina Schmitz, Vice-chairman: Professor Peter Wolf. Cooperation agreements exist with the Berger-Landefeldt Foundation and the Sibylle Ried Prize (see Website www.stiftung-michael.de).

Information on the Michael Foundation, and its activities, scholarships, and information material can be obtained from our office:

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DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. We confirm that we have read the Journal’s position on issues involved in ethical publication and affirm that this report is consistent with those guidelines.

DISCLAIMER

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awareness about epilepsy including ILAE's sister organization, the IBE and its chapters. Epilepsia does not endorse one organization over another. If you would like your non-profit organization recognized, contact us at epilepsia@epilepsia.com.