

IHS Headache Trainee Reports 2023

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Mentor: Simona Sacco
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During my stay, I attended headache clinics 3–4 days a week at the department of Neurology and Stroke Unit of Avezzano and the department of Neurology of L'Aquila. These sessions provided valuable experience in advanced headache history taking, diagnosis, and management, broadening my clinical horizons in headache medicine. After seeing each patient in the clinic, we had a brief discussion about the diagnosis and treatment selection.

Specifically, I gained knowledge about CGRP-targeting drugs which are not currently available in my country but may become available in the following years. I also had the opportunity to observe multiple nerve blocks for different types of headaches and refine my technique and indication of prescription in Botox injection for headaches. In addition, I attended clinical rounds in the neurology ward.

I also participated in a 1-day annual headache congress in Narni, Italy, on June 1st, and Roma Pain Days congress in Rome held on 13–15 June, which included sessions related to headache medicine. I co-authored three articles in headache medicine as part of my academic research contribution during my training. This experience broadened my understanding of clinical research methodologies and their practical applications in headache medicine.

In addition to headache medicine, I had the opportunity to observe advanced treatment modalities for other neurological conditions not available in my country, such as MR-guided focused ultrasound (MGFUS) for treating tremor. Throughout my training, I furthered my proficiency in effectively communicating in medical contexts.

Interacting with my Italian colleagues in English has further strengthened my proficiency in medical English, aiding in better collaboration and understanding in our shared professional environment. I also learned about the Italian healthcare system that provides publicly funded universal coverage, ensuring access to medical services for all citizens, which contrasts with the more fragmented healthcare system in my country.

Throughout my stay, I was involved in writing three articles. The first article focused on a neuropharmacological review that collaborated with a pharmacology group in Rotterdam and was led by Dr. Antoinette Maassen van den Brink, a board member of the Dutch Headache Society and European Headache Federation. This review covered the effects of acute and preventive non-specific migraine treatments on the CGRP pathway. I specifically wrote the section about the effects of Botulinum toxin injection on the CGRP pathway.

For the second article, titled "A Real-life Study on Resistant and Refractory Migraine (REFINE study)" based on the EHF definition of resistant and refractory migraine, I handled the introduction section after having discussions with the research team and going through the statistical analysis and results. Due to the broad nature of the results, we decided to split it into two articles. The first one focuses on "comorbidities in refractory and resistant migraine in contrast to non-resistant cases," and the second one explores "whether patients resistant to preventive treatments tend to be more resistant to acute medications as well."

The title of the third article was "A Call for Academic Pragmatic Clinical Trials to Address Open Questions in Migraine Prevention," and my task was to summarize and enhance the text. The article is currently being reviewed by the journal "Cephalalgia" of the IHS for publication.

The training course in L'Aquila was highly beneficial. It broadened my horizons in headache medicine, helping me refine my injection techniques and indications for treatments. The program also boosted my self-confidence in communicating with other neurologists and headache specialists globally. Additionally, I gained valuable insights into the epidemiological differences between Iran and Italy and had the privilege of contributing to research alongside one of the most renowned headache specialists, Dr. Simona Sacco.

During my stay in L'Aquila, I encountered some challenges due to the language barrier. As a neurologist seeking specialized training, I found it difficult to communicate effectively since many locals and even some colleagues spoke little to no English. This language gap sometimes made it challenging to fully grasp the nuances of the training and interact smoothly with patients and staff.

Attending this training course will be very beneficial for me in managing headache patients in my clinic. With the impending availability of CGRP-targeting drugs in Iran, I am poised to be one of the few specialists with experience in their usage. This will enable me to lead others in this area and contribute to developing guidelines tailored to our country, taking into account reimbursement and cost considerations.

Obtaining the certificate from this training will greatly enhance my CV as I plan to apply for a full-year headache fellowship in the near future. Acquiring this valuable experience will also open up opportunities to pursue academic positions.







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Mentor: Peter Goadsby

My experience as a headache observer at King's College Hospital London was characterized by 'Unlearning, learning and relearning' from the first day until the very last day. I had the opportunity to work with an amazing team and shadow experienced neurologists as well as clinical research fellows and observe their approach to diagnosing and treating patients with various types of headaches. Additionally, I had the chance to engage in discussions with the medical team, gaining insights into the latest research and treatment modalities.

I had the opportunity to participate as an observer in Botox and great occipital nerve (GON) block clinics where I learned a great deal about the use of Botox and GON block as treatment options for chronic migraines. Furthermore, I observed how clinical trials and research studies are conducted to further our understanding of headaches and develop better treatment options. I gained hands-on training on approaches such as taking detailed patient histories, performing physical examinations, conducting telephone clinics and analysing diagnostic tests.

As part of my observship, I worked on a project to compare the clinical presentation, triggers and acute medications of Caucasian and African migraineurs based on real patient data under the supervision of Professor Goadsby who I was fortunate to work with. I am currently analysing the data of the study and will hopefully present the findings at an International Headache Conference in 2025. Also, I presented my current research project which seeks to determine the epidemiology of primary headache disorders and impact of migraines on health-related quality of life in Cameroon. I received valuable feedback on my

research methodology and suggestions for further improvement. This helped me to refine my data collection tools and analytical approach. My overall experience as a headache observer at King's College Hospital London was really rewarding. I am immensely grateful to the International Headache Society for this experience that has given my professional career a significant boost and expanded my knowledge and understanding of headache disorders. I also appreciate my supervisor at King's College Hospital, Professor Goadsby, for his guidance and mentorship throughout my observship. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to the clinical team of the Headache group at King's College Hospital for their support and allowing me to be part of their work. I also appreciate my fellow observer, Wan Aliaa Binti, for her wonderful support during my observership.

The experience as a headache observer at King's College Hospital London has greatly expanded my knowledge and understanding of headache disorders. Thanks to the knowledge and skills that I acquired during the observership, I was able to pass the exam for my postgraduate certificate training in headache and facial pain. With the knowledge and skills acquired, I intend to train other healthcare professionals on the management and treatment of headaches in my country so as to improve the quality of care for patients suffering from headache disorders. I also intend to set up a headache clinic in my country to provide specialized care and support for patients with headache disorders. Additionally, the experience has allowed me to establish valuable connections and collaborations with experts in the field of headache medicine. I believe that these connections will be instrumental in furthering my research and clinical career, as well as contributing to the advancement of headache medicine in my country and beyond.

Lastly, this exposure has not only fuelled my passion for headache medicine but has also solidified my commitment to pursuing a career in this field. Hence, I plan to pursue further training and education in headache medicine to enhance my expertise and contribute to the field through research, teaching, and clinical practice.

