

IHS Trainee Programme Reports 2024

Alexander Pabón Moreno, Colombia



Host Institution: Hospital Universitario Río Hortega, Valladolid, Spain

Mentor: David García Azorín

September to December 2025

This training period represented a highly valuable academic and clinical experience, characterized by clearly defined objectives from the outset, a structured methodology, and a comprehensive approach to patients with headache disorders. The training was fully aligned with evidence-based clinical practice and with the criteria of the International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd edition (ICHD-3).



Hospital Universitario Río Hortega, Valladolid, Spain

Training Objectives

From the beginning of the rotation, clear training objectives were established, aimed at strengthening specialized clinical competencies in headache medicine. The main objectives achieved were:

- To consolidate the performance of a complete, structured, and headache-oriented clinical history in patients consulting for headache.
- To accurately diagnose and classify primary headache disorders according to the clear and detailed criteria of the ICHD-3 (International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd edition).
- To recognize red flags and warning signs, and to understand the initial management required when these are present.
- To understand the symptomatic treatment of headache disorders, including indications, contraindications, and appropriate patient education regarding their use.

- To identify when preventive treatment is indicated, to understand the available therapeutic options, their main adverse effects and contraindications, and how these treatments should be prescribed.
- To acquire practical experience in performing pericranial nerve anesthetic blocks, as well as in the administration of botulinum toxin.
- To systematically examine cranio-cervical structures potentially involved in headache disorders.

Activities Performed and Competencies Acquired

During the rotation, I actively participated in the clinical care of patients with primary and secondary headache disorders, which allowed the consolidation of competencies in:

- Preparation of clinical histories specifically focused on headache disorders.
- Rigorous diagnostic classification according to the ICHD-3, integrating clinical characteristics, temporal evolution, and treatment response.
- Early identification of warning signs and appropriate clinical decision-making.
- Rational selection of symptomatic and preventive treatments, individualized according to the patient's clinical profile.
- Therapeutic patient education as a fundamental component of comprehensive headache management.
- Targeted examination of cranio-cervical structures.
- Supervised performance of pericranial nerve anesthetic blocks, as well as botulinum toxin administration, integrating indications, technique, and clinical follow-up.

The continuous supervision of David facilitated a progressive, critical, and reflective learning process, integrating theoretical knowledge with daily clinical practice.



First Floor HURH- Alexander Pabon, David Azorin



Hospital Entrance – HURH

Multidisciplinary Work

A particularly relevant aspect of the training was the coordinated work with the nursing team and other healthcare professionals, which reinforced a comprehensive approach to patients with headache disorders. Interaction with the nursing staff was essential for understanding clinical follow-up, patient education, and the correct application of pharmacological treatments and interventional procedures.



Nursing Team – Headache Unit

Academic Development and Professional Projection

With the support of David, I had the opportunity to attend the Congress of the Sociedad Española de Neurología (SEN), as well as to become a member of the SEN, which represented a significant added value to the overall training experience.

Of particular relevance, the rotation fostered strong motivation toward research in headache medicine. The methodological guidance received allowed me to expand, refine, and better structure my research proposals, strengthening my academic competencies and projecting future lines of clinical research in my home country.

Additionally, during the rotation, foundations were established for the continuity of collaborative work in headache research projects. Furthermore, orientation and future referral have been provided in the process of consolidating and strengthening the Headache Unit at my home institution, with the aim of progressively aligning it with the clinical, organizational, and academic standards promoted by the SEN. This accompaniment, within the framework of the mentorship received, reinforces the institutional projection of the training and its sustained impact on the development of specialized headache care.

Expected impact of the headache training

The knowledge and skills acquired during this training will be directly applied at the Center of Excellence for Primary Headache Disorders, which I lead at the International Hospital of Colombia, with the following expected impact:

- Improved diagnostic accuracy and therapeutic management of patients with headache disorders.
- Strengthening of multidisciplinary collaboration in the management of craniofacial pain.
- Training of colleagues and healthcare personnel through structured academic and clinical activities.
- Development of local research projects aligned with international standards.

Conclusion

The headache training rotation at Hospital Universitario Río Hortega has been a highly formative experience, with significant clinical, academic, and professional impact. I express my sincere gratitude to Dr. David García Azorín for his mentorship, availability, and commitment to training, as well as to the International Headache Society for making this opportunity possible. This programme has fully achieved its objectives and has reinforced my commitment to the development and improvement of headache care in my country.

Andre Dharmawan Wijono, Indonesia



Host institution: ICOT Hospital, Sapienza University, Rome, Italy

Mentor: Gianluca Coppola

November 2024 to February 2025

I had the opportunity to participate in the IHS Trainee Programme in Italy for three months under the supervision of Prof. Gianluca Coppola at ICOT Hospital, Sapienza University. This programme provided me with extensive exposure to the clinical and research aspects of headache medicine.

During my stay, I was actively involved in the outpatient headache clinic, where I observed the management of patients with various primary and secondary headache disorders. This experience allowed me to gain deeper insights into the diagnostic approach, clinical examinations, and treatment strategies, including pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions. The structured approach to headache evaluation and management in this setting has broadened my clinical perspective and refined my decision-making process in treating headache patients.

In addition to clinical exposure, I had the privilege of attending a scientific meeting. This meeting covered a wide range of topics, including recent advancements in headache research, pathophysiological mechanisms, and emerging treatment options. I also had the chance to observe some of the ongoing research projects conducted by Prof. Coppola, which further enhanced my understanding of translational research in headache medicine.

A key highlight of my experience was the opportunity to engage in discussions with Prof. Coppola and other headache practitioners. These interactions were invaluable in deepening my knowledge, as I was able to exchange ideas, ask critical questions, and gain insights from experts in the field. Their approach to patient care and research has inspired me to integrate evidence-based strategies into my own clinical practice.

During my time in the IHS Trainee Programme, I have been working on a narrative review titled "*Migraine and Ischemic Stroke Due to Cerebral Small Vessel Disease: A Narrative Review*", in collaboration with Prof. Gianluca Coppola. This review aims to explore the relationship between migraine and ischemic stroke, particularly in the context of cerebral small vessel disease (CSVD).

Migraine has been identified as a potential risk factor for ischemic stroke, but the underlying mechanisms remain complex and multifactorial. Our review focuses on the role of CSVD as a possible link between these two conditions, discussing pathophysiological mechanisms, shared vascular and neuroinflammatory processes, and implications for clinical management. We also examine current evidence and highlight potential gaps in the literature that warrant further research.

This project has provided me with valuable insights into the intersection of headache disorders and cerebrovascular disease. Through discussions with Prof. Coppola and a thorough literature review, I have gained a deeper understanding of the evolving concepts in this field. We hope that this work will contribute to a better understanding of migraine-related stroke risk and guide future research directions in headache and vascular neurology.

Overall, this programme has been an enriching experience, providing me with a strong foundation in headache medicine. Throughout the three months, I have gained significant insights into headache disorders, particularly in terms of diagnosis, clinical examination, and treatment strategies. Many of the questions that had previously puzzled me about headache medicine have been answered through my clinical exposure, discussions with Prof. Coppola, and participation in academic meetings.

However, I feel that three months is a relatively short period to fully grasp the complexity of headache disorders, especially when considering the possibility of conducting a clinical study alongside clinical training. While I have made substantial progress in my understanding, a longer duration—such as a dedicated fellowship—would have allowed for deeper involvement in both clinical practice and research.

Overall, this experience has been invaluable in strengthening my clinical and academic foundation in headache medicine. It has also inspired me to continue learning and exploring further opportunities to specialize in this field.

The biggest challenge I encountered during my time in Italy was the language barrier. Most patients and healthcare professionals primarily spoke Italian, which made it difficult for me to fully understand patients' complaints in real time. This occasionally limited my ability to follow the clinical interactions as they happened.

However, Prof. Coppola was very supportive in bridging this gap. After each consultation, he would summarize the key points of the case and discuss the essential aspects with me. This allowed me to stay engaged in the learning process despite the language limitations.

After returning to Indonesia, I plan to work as a neurologist specializing in headache and pain. The experience has enhanced my clinical skills and broadened my perspective on evidence-based approaches to headache treatment.

Beyond clinical knowledge, this programme has also provided valuable professional connections with international neurologists, particularly within the headache field. My interactions with Prof. Coppola and other experts have opened opportunities for future collaborations, research, and continued learning. Additionally, my exposure to the IHS has given me access to a global network of headache specialists and resources that will be beneficial in my practice.

Furthermore, this experience has reinforced my commitment to promoting headache medicine in Indonesia. I hope to contribute to the recognition and development of headache as a subspecialty, improve patient care, and encourage greater involvement of Indonesian neurologists in the international headache community.



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