

# It's been a decade: The Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society

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## Abstract

The Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society (SYNS) comes to life in 2008, creating a community renowned for its unique spirit, a platform dedicated to lifelong teaching and learning. In 2008, a small group of Swiss residents found a cross-canton training platform to provide dedicated, affordable courses organized by residents to directly support their peers. After almost 10 years, SYNS thrives on its unique, familial spirit cultivating a direct contact with teachers as well as with their supporters. The society provides up to four annual training courses and serves as an open platform for residents to exchange experiences and to represent their members' interests on a national and international level.

## Keywords

Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society, SYNS, neurosurgery, residency, Switzerland, neurosurgical training, training courses, young neuroscientists

They believed in thinking differently and set out on a mission to challenge the status quo of neurosurgical training in Switzerland. After an initial brainstorming phase between 2006 and 2008, the Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society (SYNS) came to life in 2008, creating a community renowned for its unique spirit, a platform dedicated to lifelong teaching and learning—a mission envisioned by a small, committed group of neurosurgical residents.

## Desperate times call for desperate measures

Long working hours, occasional sleep deprivation, and a packed board exam objectives catalog coupled with the rising demand of staying up to date with current techniques and recent developments characterize modern neurosurgical training. Residents find themselves immersed in a rapidly evolving field demanding a lifelong dedication to self-improvement on an intellectual and manual level.

In 2008, a small group of Swiss residents set out to tackle the shortcomings of their national curriculum. They envision a cross-canton training platform; dedicated, affordable courses organized by residents to

directly support their peers, to meet the rising needs necessary to successfully complete their training. With this ambitious goal in mind, they search for support from their peers, local departments, the national society as well as the industry.

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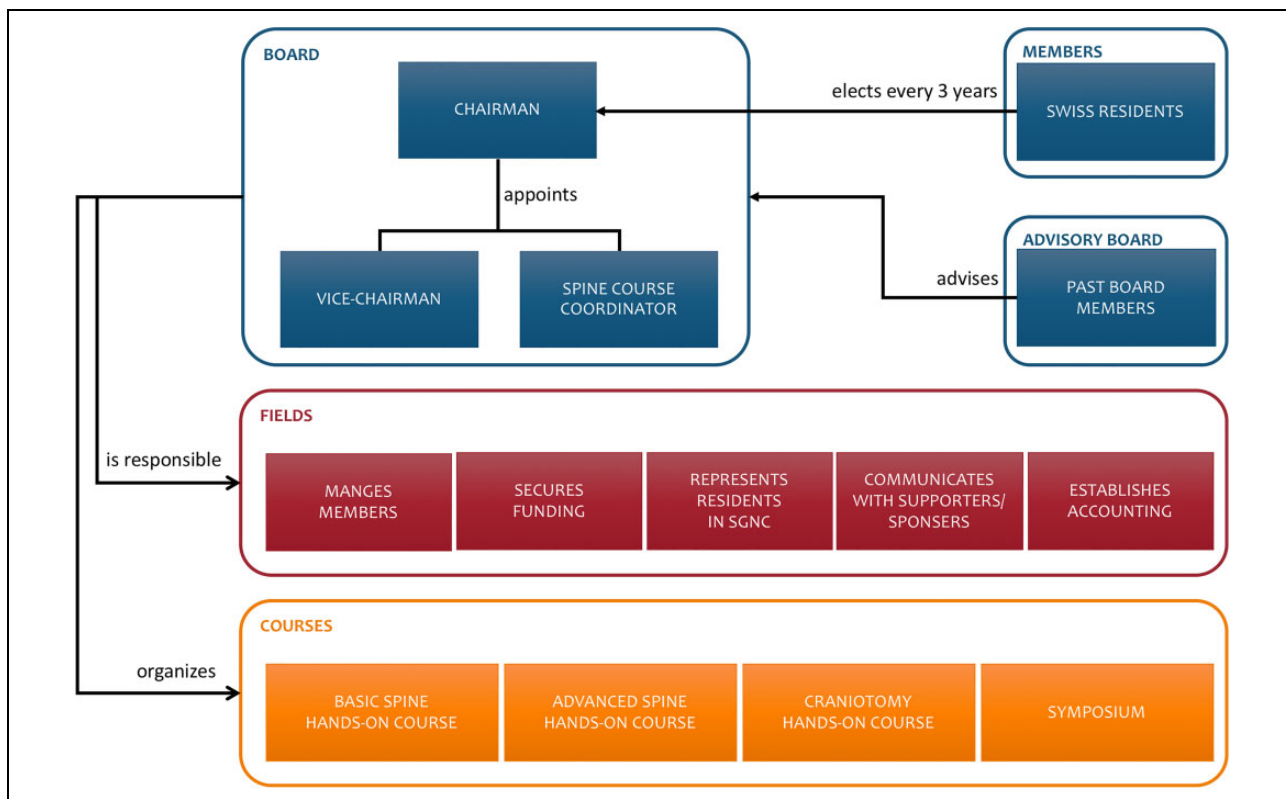
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**Figure 1.** Organization of the Swiss Young Neurosurgeons Society.

## All beginnings are hard

Some might say it all starts here. Philippe Schucht nervously glimpses at his watch in front of Griesalp, a remote mountain-inn in the picturesque Bernese Alps as moments of doubt cross his mind: Will anyone show up or did he just make a huge fool of himself? To initiate the mission of SYNS with verve, he insisted on organizing a 3-day symposium on neurosurgical oncology for residents, backing unsure funding with his own resources despite sparse initial enthusiasm from many invited speakers. A dozen of residents and a hand full of speakers, among them global players in neuro-oncology such as Prof. R Stupp, are invited, but nobody has shown up yet. The idea of the symposium is to meet in a unique environment aside from the hassles of everyday work and to bring together bright, committed teachers and eager trainees in a welcoming, personal atmosphere to learn the essentials from the experts.

All tension drops as a column of cars is seen driving up the narrow mountain pass, and finally everybody does show up. The first SYNS Symposium turns out to be a huge success and an important milestone of this young, ambitious society. Ever since it has been held annually in secluded places in Switzerland on various topics of neurosurgery. Carried on by the initial momentum in 2009, the course repertoire is gradually expanded to encompass a junior-level hands-on spine course on anatomical specimens in 2010, a hands-on craniotomy course in 2014, and

a senior level spine course in 2017. SYNS thrives on its unique, familial spirit cultivating a direct contact to teachers as well as to the supporters from the national society and from the industry. In 2017, SYNS is able to provide four training courses with a total of 72 participants, thereof 42 on anatomical specimens. It serves as an open platform for residents to exchange experiences and is proud to represent their members' interests within the national Swiss Society of Neurosurgery (SGNC) as well as in numerous interdisciplinary organs with the aim to actively participate in the future development of Swiss neurosurgery.

## Unique efficiency thanks to an autonomous and lean organization

SYNS keeps its organization lean to make decision processes fast, efficient, and open-minded. Its board consists of a chairman, vice-chairman, and a spinal course coordinator. The board organizes and coordinates the courses, takes care of sustainable funding, and represents their members on a national and international level. The SYNS members at the general assembly elect its chairman for a period of 3 years. Past board members are invited to participate in the advisory board, providing the young society with invaluable expertise (Figure 1).

The board is free to determine all of the activities of SYNS as it pleases, which has become a hallmark of the innovative character of this society. Each generation can

implement in its own vision and ideas, creating an environment of continuous change and improvement.

The unique commitment of the SYNS members to a society which is fully theirs and for which they are fully responsible grants significant advantages. All organizational tasks are provided on a pro bono basis by the board and the SYNS members without the need for costly external administration management and conference organization. Hence, SYNS is able to provide its symposium and courses at a fraction of the usual costs, making SYNS courses accessible especially to junior residents.

All neurosurgical residents performing their training in Switzerland are eligible to become SYNS members. The process is straightforward with the only prerequisite being a junior membership of the national society of Neurosurgery, SGNC.

### Current activities and future prospects

Besides the core business of providing a communication and teaching platform SYNS is involved in diverse activities to represent its members' interests.

As of 2014, SYNS has been appointed a seat on the board of the SGNC with the opportunity to bring forward the residents' needs and feedback directly to SGNC as well as to participate in the future development of the national society.

To facilitate the public presentation of residents' scientific work in front of an expert panel, a SYNS scientific session was introduced at the annual meeting of SGNC. It was substantiated for the first time at the 2017 joined annual meeting of the SGNC and Swiss Society of Neuroradiology in Berne as the SYNS science slam, a scientific competition awarded by a travel grant provided by the neurosurgical department of the University Hospital in Zürich, at the occasion of its 80th anniversary.

SYNS is an active participant in the Young Clinical Neuroscientists (YouClin) Network within the Swiss Federation of Clinical Neuro-Societies, established in 2016. YouClin fosters the interdisciplinary communication within all clinical neuroscience disciplines and aims to further develop clinical and academic training opportunities for residents. As of 2018, SYNS has been invited by the *Federatio Medicorum Chirurgicorum Helvetica* to represent its interests within the umbrella organization of Swiss surgical societies. We are looking forward to it.

### Supporters and sponsors

The society has been working hard to sustain its future resources in times of ever tighter regulations and restrictions of industrial funding and was accredited the status of a non-profit organization by the local tax authority in Bern in 2016. This step strengthens the societies' commitment to conscientiously and efficiently align its funding with its mission as well as paves the way to the support from the private sector as private donations are now eligible to a tax refund.

SYNS heavily relies on the support of its sponsors and benefactors to sustainably provide financially demanding courses in an affordable manner to its members. We thank all the companies and private benefactors who believe in our mission and continue to overwhelm us with their invaluable support. For a detailed list of our supporters and further information, please visit <http://www.syns.ch>.

Nadia Khan—SYNS Founding Member  
 Bertrand Actor—SYNS Founding Member  
 Gord von Campe—SYNS Founding Member  
 Ivan Radovanovic—SYNS Founding Member  
 Dominique Kuhlen—SYNS Founding Member and Vice-Chairman 2008–2011  
 Philippe Schucht—SYNS Founding Member and Chairman 2008–2011  
 Janine Abu-Isa—SYNS Vice-Chairman 2011–2014  
 Christian Fung—SYNS Chairman 2011–2014  
 Astrid Jilch—SYNS Vice-Chairman 2014–2017  
 Michael Murek—SYNS Chairman 2014–2017  
 Jens Fichtner—SYNS Spine Course Coordinator 2010–2017  
 Irena Zubak—SYNS Vice-Chairman 2017–current  
 Amir El-Rahal—SYNS Chairman 2017–current

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