Dr. Jacques Morcos Named AANS President-Elect, Faculty and Residents Shine at Neurosurgery Conference

Surgeons with the Department of Neurological Surgery at UHealth – University of Miami Health System and the Miller School of Medicine had a significant presence at the recent American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) meeting in Los Angeles. Miller School faculty presented research and contributed to a number of sessions.

Jacques J. Morcos, M.D., FAANS, addressing the AANS.

The AANS has approximately 13,000 members worldwide and works to advance neurosurgery through education and advocacy.

Among the meeting’s main highlights, Jacques J. Morcos, M.D., FAANS, professor and co-chair of the Department of Neurological Surgery at the Miller School and division chief, cranial neurosurgery at UM/Jackson Memorial Hospital, was named the association’s president-elect. Michael Wang, M.D., professor of neurological surgery and rehabilitation medicine, director of the Miller School’s Spine Fellowship Program and chief of neurosurgery at University of Miami Hospital, will become the AANS’ new scientific chair.

“We are thrilled that two of our senior colleagues have been
brought into leadership,” said Allan Levi, M.D., Ph.D., professor and chairman of neurological surgery. “These are two huge positions within AANS, and I am always excited when my faculty steps up into these roles.”

A Long and Fruitful Journey

Faculty members from the Department of Neurological Surgery

Dr. Morcos may be the living embodiment of the American dream. He emigrated to the U.S. from his native Lebanon to find better opportunities and has not been disappointed.

“I came here to learn neurosurgery,” said Dr. Morcos, who came to the Miller School in 1995. “That was my dream, and it has been fulfilled severalfold since then. I am very proud to represent the Miller School as AANS president in two years.”

When Dr. Morcos assumes the presidency, he will promote the discipline and oversee the 2025 conference in Boston.

During this year’s meeting, Dr. Morcos ran the AANS Global Symposium, which brings together neurosurgeons from around the world to present important work.

“The Global Symposium was very well attended, and our people gave great talks on surgical techniques for brain tumors, spine and other areas,” said Dr. Morcos. “It was particularly nice to meet again in person after COVID world.”

One Global Symposium session discussed neural tube defects, such as spina bifida. These conditions are fully preventable
with folic acid supplements but still constitute an epidemic in some developing nations.

“Neurosurgeons aren’t just people who go into the operating room and perform various procedures,” said Dr. Morcos, “We have civic responsibilities as well. In a way, we’d like to put ourselves out of business.”

The Cushing Award

Dr. Wang presenting on spinal surgery at the AANS.

The AANS was founded in 1931 by Harvey Cushing, M.D., who pioneered neurosurgery. One of the conference’s annual highlights is the Cushing Award presentation, which honors lifetime contributions. This year, Dr. Wang presented the award to Michael Lawton, M.D., president and CEO of the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix.

Dr. Wang, medical director for minimally invasive spine surgery, helped run the Global Symposium and participated in several spine care talks, including presenting the challenges of treating paralyzed patients in Haiti.

“We talked about our experience in Haiti after the earthquake,” said Dr. Wang. “Miller School neurosurgeons treated many paralyzed victims using advanced methods. But it was a difficult situation – there was just no infrastructure.”

Other Miller School Highlights at AANS

More than 20 Miller School neurosurgeons presented at the
conference.

Ricardo Komotar, M.D., professor and medical director for neuro-oncology and director of the Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center Brain Tumor Initiative, focused on educational support. Medical students have many questions about applying for residencies, and the AANS is helping them get answers.

“There used to be few resources for applicants to even understand how to apply,” said Dr. Komotar. “It was very much word of mouth. But now, over the last two years, we’ve been making a concerted effort to offer these resources.”

Carolina Benjamin, M.D., assistant professor of neurosurgery, presented on benign but dangerous inner ear tumors called vestibular schwannomas (also called acoustic neuromas). Patients often experience balance issues, hearing loss and ringing in their ears. Dr. Benjamin moderated a panel that discussed the challenges associated with surgery and emerging clinical options.

Michael E. Ivan, M.D., M.B.S., presenting at the AANS.

“Surgery used to be the only way to treat this condition, but now we have gamma knife radiosurgery,” said Dr. Benjamin. “At UM, we’ve adopted a multidisciplinary approach, and we can offer less invasive treatments.”
Michael Ivan, M.D., assistant professor of neurosurgery, discussed his ongoing efforts to use artificial intelligence to improve diagnoses, surgical planning and complex skull base tumors.

“We are developing AI methods to see beyond what is visible on brain images,” said Dr. Ivan. “We can learn more about tumors before we operate, plan safer surgeries and identify disease progression earlier to rapidly adjust treatments and improve overall survival.”

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