Miller School Neurologists Present Work at AAN; Colleagues Honor the Late Dr. Ralph Sacco

The American Academy of Neurology (AAN) kicked off its annual meeting with a tribute to renowned stroke neurologist and past president Ralph Sacco, M.D.

AAN President Orly Avitzur, M.D. (upper left), eulogized the Miller School's Ralph Sacco, M.D.

In a moving keynote address, AAN President Orly Avitzur, M.D., eulogized Dr. Sacco, who suffered from glioblastoma and died in January.

The moment was made even more poignant by videos from Dr. Sacco, who spent his last months recording personal and professional insights and musing on the condition that would take his life. The irony of a neurologist dying from a brain disease was not lost on him.

Dr. Sacco was remembered as a selfless man who made an indelible mark on medicine. He chaired the Miller School’s Department of Neurology, was professor of neurology, public health sciences, human genetics and neurosurgery, executive director of the Evelyn McKnight Brain Institute, senior associate dean for clinical and translational science and
chief of the neurology service at Jackson Memorial Hospital. He was the only person to lead both the AAN and the American Heart Association (AHA).

“If you had the privilege of working with or training under Dr. Sacco, you also know that he was a remarkable human being with a kind heart and a wonderful laugh,” said Dr. Avitzur. “This plenary address is a tribute to Ralph and his legacy and to the decades of AAN work in brain health.”

Miller School Neurologists Discuss Their Work

Jose Romano, M.D., professor and interim chair of neurology, helped celebrate the Miller School’s neurology department’s 60th anniversary. At the department’s alumni reception, he spoke about the department’s growth and impact, including housing one of the largest neuroscience training programs in the country.

“I highlighted the contribution from our three long-serving chairs — particularly Dr. Sacco, who led an impactful life and advocated for neurologists and neurological research. He will be sorely missed,” said Dr. Romano. “Overall, the meeting allowed us to contribute and learn new ideas and share knowledge and best practices. Since COVID-19 eased, we have really enjoyed getting together and seeing colleagues in
person.”

(Clockwise from top left) Rahul Ganatra, M.D., M.P.H.; Teshamae Monteith, M.D.; and Seemant Chaturvedi, M.D., participated in the NEJM Conference Watch.

Teshamae Monteith, M.D., associate professor of clinical neurology and chief of the Headache Division in the Department of Neurology, participated in The New England Journal of Medicine Journal Watch conference coverage and presented on cluster headaches, other primary headache disorders, treating headaches in the emergency department and other topics. As headache topic chair, she helped with abstract reviews and the scientific sessions.

“I was quite impressed by the quality of research submissions this year and the potential to impact neurological care, especially migraine management,” said Dr. Monteith.

Alberto R. Ramos, M.D., M.S., professor of clinical neurology and research director of the Sleep Disorders Program, directed a course on parasomnias, which include a variety of sleep disorders. The course was well attended, with more than 140 participants.

“We described the normal variants of sleep, the theories of REM sleep, and the influence of the pandemic on sleep patterns,” said Dr. Ramos. “We also discussed the risk factors for parasomnias and their consequences.”
Miller School neurology faculty, residents and fellows in front of poster presentations at the AAN.

In an invited science session, Dr. Ramos presented results from the Study of Latinos-Investigation of Neurocognitive Aging, a sub-study of the Hispanic Community Health Study/Study of Latinos, the largest study of Latino adults ever undertaken. The research produced many findings, including linking abnormal sleep patterns to smaller brain volumes.

Ihtsham U. Haq, M.D., professor of neurology and chief of the Movement Disorders Division, moderated a panel, “Movement Disorders: Phenotyping and Biomarkers,” which highlighted diagnostic approaches to Parkinson’s disease (PD) and other conditions.

“This was a great session to moderate, with high engagement from both physicians and industry attendees,” said Dr. Haq. “The unifying theme was the need for multiple PD biomarkers to determine its presence, severity and risk of progression. We surveyed a wide array of potential biomarkers, including skin biopsies, extracellular vesicles, microRNA, tears and automated voice analysis.”

One of the highlights for Miller School attendees was the alumni reception. Around 90 people came to the event, including recent graduates and alums spanning three decades, providing unique opportunities for colleagues to connect.

“The 2023 AAN meeting was an incredible event filled with cutting-edge neuroscience, pivotal networking opportunities and engaging, collaborative experiences,” said Gillian Gordon
Perue, M.D., assistant professor of clinical neurology and chief of neurology at Jackson South and Jackson West Medical Centers, who moderated a session on cerebrovascular disease and interventional neurology research.

Dr. Leticia Tornes received the AAN's Program Director Recognition Award.

In addition, Leticia Tornes, M.D., associate professor of clinical neurology and assistant program director for the University of Miami Neurology Resident Program was honored with the prestigious 2023 AAN Program Director Recognition Award.

**Advancing Preventive Neurology**

Dr. Sacco had long advocated a multi-organization approach to brain health. In particular, he wanted to give people better tools to prevent neurological diseases and improve survival. To advance these goals, Dr. Sacco left bequests to the AAN and the AHA, which have established The Ralph L. Sacco, M.D., Memorial Fund for Brain Health.

Dr. Sacco’s recording library is now housed at AAN. In one of the clips presented at the meeting, he discussed the personal significance of his disease.

“As a neurologist, this is probably the first time I’ve experienced a neurological condition,” he said. “I thought it would be helpful to... record some of my thoughts on what it’s
like to be a patient. As neurologists, we take care of many patients with multiple different conditions. I wanted to share some of my experiences in the hope that others might benefit and recognize that you’re not alone when you go through a chronic neurological condition.”

View "A Final Chat with Our Neurologist-Guides for AAN 2023."

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