

GBS/CIDP FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL INTERNATIONAL LIAISONS' CONFERENCE 2008

BERLIN, GERMANY

BY EVAN R. ROTHMAN

BERLIN, THE CAPITAL CITY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY, is a thoroughly modern city embracing the many and varied cultures and peoples of Europe, and increasingly those of the rest of the world. With a population in excess of 3.5 million people, Berliners have made their city one of the world's most innovative through its "green" (environmental) policies. Berliners, simply put, have made it their business to help the world in any way they can.

It is fitting then that Estelle Benson, founder of the GBS/CIDP Foundation International, selected Berlin as the host city of its recent International Liaisons' Conference. Invited liaisons from the United States, Spain, Great Britain, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Romania, Turkey, Israel, India and South Africa descended on Berlin to discuss the various methods of developing GBS/CIDP Foundation International groups in their home countries, with the ultimate objectives of serving patients with Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), Chronic Inflammatory Demyelinating Polyneuropathy (CIDP) and its variants, with support, education and research.

Adding greatly to the significance of this conference was the attendance of PPTA, major medical companies and world-renowned medical doctors with a passion for GBS, CIDP and its variants.

Founded in the U.S. in Pennsylvania in 1980, the foundation has grown to enormous proportions with volunteers all around the world and more than 26,000 members. All members of this foundation have directly experienced GBS, CIDP or its variants, or have been indirectly affected.

The two-day conference proved a resounding success, with the newly formed GBS/CIDP Foundation International groups receiving

invaluable information, assistance and support that will enable them to provide more effective roles as liaisons in establishing support and care networks in their countries. This meeting also gave the invited delegates the opportunity to meet face-to-face, which will greatly improve future communication, support and cooperation.

Creating support groups helps patients overcome the debilitating effects of their illnesses. The volunteers who devote of their time, energies and resources bring hope, friendship and care to the patients. With a greater enthusiasm, these international liaisons will use their newly acquired skills to dynamically enhance the effectiveness and reach of the support groups in their countries.

Having personally been afflicted with Guillain-Barré Syndrome, I vowed that no other patient would experience these illnesses alone and so went about establishing a GBS/CIDP support group in South Africa. It is with this same energy and enthusiasm that every GBS/CIDP Foundation International group has been created! With this in our hearts the GBS/CIDP Foundation International groups in each of our countries are without a doubt richer and greater. ●

EVAN R. ROTHMAN is the founder of the GBS/CIDP chapter in South Africa.

Delegates at the GBS/CIDP Foundation International Liaisons' Conference in Berlin

