

Meet Kathrin Zopf, our 2024 European Endocrine Nurse Awardee



Kathrin Zopf, from Berlin, Germany, is our 2024 European Endocrine Nurse Awardee. She will deliver her Award Lecture in Stockholm at ECE 2024. Read on to learn more about her career in endocrinology, her advice for future endocrinologists, and what you can look forward to hearing her talk about at the Congress.

Please tell us about your current role

I have been a team member of the Department of Endocrinology at the Charité in Berlin since 2004. I currently work there as a study nurse for a large number of projects. Since 2014, I have also educated patients with adrenal insufficiency, according to a structured patient education programme of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Endokrinologie (DGE, the German Society for Endocrinology). Within the DGE, I am the spokesperson for the Endocrinology Assistants section. I have been a member of the ESE Nurse Committee since 2022.

How were you inspired to work in endocrinology?

Originally, I didn't want to become a nurse. After graduating from high school, I studied to be a teacher and decided to go into nursing in 1990. From 1990 to 2004, I first completed my three-year training programme and then worked as a nurse on an internal medicine ward in Cottbus, southeast of Berlin. There, the senior physician enrolled me on the first DGE Endocrinology Assistant Course, where I acquired a solid basic knowledge of endocrinology.

I later applied to join Christian Strasburger's working group at the Charité and was able to gain a lot of experience and knowledge through my work here. I always had the opportunity to attend all the training courses on offer. This also enabled me to network with colleagues.

What will you discuss in your Award Lecture at ECE 2024?

Specialised training for nurses is not established everywhere. It makes me very proud that the DGE has successfully enabled nurses and medical assistants to qualify as DGE Endocrinology Assistants for more than 20 years. My successful completion of the first course in 2001 was life-changing and enabled me to engage in professional exchange with colleagues from other European countries and beyond, even under the difficult conditions that exist for the nursing profession in Germany.

I will try to show how challenging it is to get ahead as a nurse in a highly developed country such as Germany. The nursing profession is not academised in Germany and there are currently only a few model projects with academised nurses, who are not allowed to work as independently as is possible in the UK, Scandinavia and most European countries. However, it is possible to specialise in the field of endocrinology and to establish yourself as an important member of the endocrine team.

To this end, it is very important that regular further training is offered, and that nursing staff can keep up to date with the latest developments in the specialist field. It is therefore crucial to create and establish these opportunities for endocrine nurses.

What is likely to be the next breakthrough in your area of interest?

That is difficult to answer. I would be delighted if we could continue to expand the European network and involve more endocrine nurses in it. We can learn so much from each other. The wealth of expertise in our community was demonstrated by the publication of the first textbook for specialised nursing in endocrinology, which was supported by ESE.

What are the biggest challenges in your field right now?

I hope that I and my colleagues in Germany will finally catch up with the training of nurses elsewhere in Europe and most other countries. There is still a lot to do. The role that nursing professionals will play in Germany in the future is also an exciting topic, and a challenge every day.

What are you most proud of in your career, and in life in general?

My greatest achievement was the founding of the Endocrinology Assistants section of the DGE. This was a very important milestone, and one which I am very proud of. Together with the relevant DGE committees, we have succeeded in establishing an organisational structure for nursing professions within the DGE. Annual training courses are organised by nurses for nurses, and space is provided for professional exchange. I was inspired by my involvement in the ESE Nurse Working Group (now the ESE Nurse Committee) and my role as spokesperson for Endocrinology Assistants.

What is the most enjoyable aspect of your work?

My job offers so many opportunities to support patients on their journey. Part of my work involves clinical trials. When I look back and see the new treatment options that have opened up for patients during my career, it's very impressive. I also enjoy the day-to-day training and counselling of patients. Here I can impart knowledge to patients and their relatives and provide them with practical tips to prevent emergencies such as the dreaded Addison's crisis. This is a very rewarding task that is particularly appreciated by patients.

What are you most looking forward to at ECE 2024?

I am especially looking forward to meeting my colleagues again and exchanging ideas with them. I have known many of them for over a decade. Of course, I will be very excited to receive the ESE European Nurse Award. It will certainly be a very special moment for me, especially as this is just the second time the award has been presented.

Why should people join ESE?

ESE has been supporting nursing staff in endocrinology for many years and offers the necessary space for exchange between colleagues and professional training. The latest knowledge from all areas of endocrinology is available here. Anyone who is interested is welcome and has the opportunity to participate actively. This opportunity, which is even supported financially by annual ESE Nurse Grants, should definitely be utilised.

What words of wisdom do you have for aspiring endocrinologists?

Endocrinology is a very exciting specialty and offers a broad field of activity, especially for nurses. My advice to all endocrine nurses is to remain persistent and keep pursuing your professional goals and visions.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

I am very grateful for the great support from medical colleagues in my immediate environment in Germany and from my international nurse colleagues, who have always encouraged me. We have already achieved a lot for Endocrinology Assistants in Germany. We are still a long way from reaching our goal, but with patience and persistence we can certainly achieve a lot more.