

President's Message

Robert A. Bray, Ph.D., dip.ABHI

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Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The 27th Annual ASHI meeting has come and gone and with it the passing of another year. For this year, more so than in years past, I would like to thank each and every one of you who made the trip to San Francisco. I realize that in these uncertain times it would have been perfectly understandable to decide against attending the meeting. However, this year's meeting was very well attended and, I believe, stands as a testament to the dedication and courage of the individuals in our field. I sincerely hope that all who traveled to the meeting had a safe and uneventful return home. For those of you who, for whatever personal reason, decided against travel at this time, we recognize the importance of your decision and hope that you will continue to support ASHI and that you will consider attending next year's meeting in Nashville, Tennessee.

This past year has seen many changes in the world and in our own lives. While some of us were directly affected by the events of September 11th, all of our lives were, in some way, changed by these tragic events. Our view of the world has changed and our beliefs in mankind may have been shaken but, I hope, not irreparably damaged. One could spend hours contemplating why such tragic things happen. Are they random events in history? Is there a grand plan? The unfortunate reality of life is that such events do occur. Time spent pondering the depths of these questions or their origin may be consoling but is not always productive. We must, however, cope with and confront these new challenges and circumstances. We must not forget these events but must make our own personal adaptations and move forward.

With this in mind, ASHI has embarked on a new mission to move our society forward. These efforts will present ASHI with many new opportunities and challenges. With the help of many of you, ASHI has already made great strides this past year in moving the society in a positive direction. As our needs have grown, so too has our need for professional support and management. In an effort to obtain the best possible support for the society we have selected a new management company. Beginning on January 1, 2002, Association Headquarters, located in Mt. Laurel, NJ, will be our new management firm. We are confident that they will be an invaluable partner in helping ASHI attain its goals. Many of these goals were set forth as part of a strategic planning session held last spring. Among the many goals for the society, one common theme was "Better Recognition of ASHI." We have decided that, for the most part, ASHI was not considered a major entity in transplantation immunobiology and immunogenetics. There have been several indications that support this perception. First, ASHI was initially excluded from focus groups and workshops that were designed to address clinical practice that directly involved histocompatibility. Such focus groups are critical for bringing together all individuals within a certain area to discuss important issues. Also, there were important scientific meetings that ASHI was initially left out of, not deliberately, but because ASHI was not consciously thought of. Also, ASHI is not well known among our patient groups. Lastly, in the legislative/regulatory arena, we are only recognized by a few select groups. Hence, it is obvious that we must make concerted efforts to correct these misperceptions of our society. ASHI, as a scientific society, has much to offer. I believe that, more so than many other societies, ASHI can offer a variety of things to many different groups. Our mission statement clearly states that we are:

"...a professional society dedicated to advancing the science and practice of immunogenetics and its impact on the quality of human life."

The key points in our mission statement are: "Professional Society," "Basic Science" and "Clinical Practice." These aspects have been the cornerstones of ASHI since its inception and they are the dynamic basis that

has kept ASHI viable. However, we have, for the most part, remained in the background. ASHI must be willing to put forth the efforts that will move the society forward. In the clinical arena, we will be participating in several upcoming conferences that are designed to make recommendations regarding clinical practice. ASHI must be willing to bring forth and defend ideas that are supported by sound scientific data. Based on such data, we must then be willing to present this information to our colleagues and, more importantly, prepare informative publications for scientific groups as well as for patients and other non-scientific support groups. Our position, however, must be founded in good science. To this end, ASHI has added some new sub-committees. Dr. John Thompson is chairing a subcommittee on clinical trials and ASHI is in the early stages of developing a data sub-committee. Both of these committees will be charged with providing ASHI with the latest information that will help support appropriate clinical testing. These sub-committees are in line with the society's Big Audacious Goal which is:

“...to be acknowledged as global leaders in generating and translating immunogenetic knowledge to improve human health.”

In addition to this major focus area, we have identified 4 other key focus areas. These key areas are:

1. Membership
2. Making Ourselves Known
3. Scientific Leadership
4. Re-Engineering Ourselves
5. Re-Structuring Laboratory Practice

Within each of these key focus areas we have identified many challenges and opportunities. I have outlined only a few in the area of “Making Ourselves Known.” For the key focus area of “Re-engineering Ourselves,” we are approaching this with two major initiatives: 1) our new management firm, and 2) restructuring the leadership positions of ASHI. In the past, the entire responsibility for running the society seemed to fall on one individual, the president. While this was an apparently efficient way to run the society, in actuality it was not in the best interest of the society. The job of running ASHI is more than one individual can effectively handle. Hence, issues did not always get the full attention they deserved. Moreover, with only one person holding the reins, there tended to be a lack of continuity with respect to ASHI's direction. In more recent years we have attempted to spread the work around by essentially involving all of council on most of the decisions. However, this still was not the most effective way to run the society. Hence, we have put forth a new initiative that can have a significant positive impact on our society. The proposal for restructuring the ASHI leadership was presented in San Francisco. The task force that was charged with this task did an outstanding job of listening to all the input as they prepared their model. Even then, there were changes and the task force responded admirably. The task force consisted of Dr. Sandra Rosen-Bronsen, Joan McAuley, Cathi Murphey and Dr. Paula Romano. The details of the re-structuring will be sent out shortly and its fate will be in your hands. We need all ASHI members to comment on this proposal so that we can move forward.

In the areas of “Scientific Leadership” and “Restructuring Laboratory Practice” we have many miles to travel. There are many challenges ahead of us; challenges such as HIPPA, CLIA, and CPT coding just to name a few. We have begun addressing these issues by forming subcommittees on clinical trials and on data collection/analysis. Only through a thorough understanding of data can we best offer scientific leadership.

Last, but by no means least, is our membership. We need to provide services and support to our members such that membership in ASHI is highly desirable. Here too, we are making strides. We have completely redone the ASHI website. Hopefully, this will make access to information easier for our members. We are also moving forward with other member initiatives in the areas of continuing education and publications. We hope these initiatives will bring more value to your ASHI membership. However, we do need to hear from you and are interested in your needs as ASHI members. What are the items that you value in your ASHI membership?

In short, ASHI needs to be doing a number of things differently and better than before. During the strategic plan roll-out at the annual meeting in San Francisco, Dr. Dolly Tyan told us of a saying her minister uses from time to time. I think it bears repeating here.

“If you always do what you always did, then you will always get what you always got.”

ASHI cannot continue as usual and we cannot move forward without your input. So, as Dr. Tyan did last year, I too challenge each and every one of you to become involved and make a difference. I am certain that if we all work together, ASHI can achieve its goals. I look forward to working with all of you during this upcoming and exciting year.

Robert A. Bray, Ph.D., dip.ABHI
President