

President's Column

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Dear Friends and Colleagues:

January 1st has come and gone and we have begun another year. Much has transpired with respect to ASHI since my last letter. Most notably, we have begun what I hope will be a long and productive relationship with our new management firm, Association Headquarters (AH). AH is located in Mt. Laurel, NJ, which is close to the Philadelphia area. Our new executive director is Mr. Len Morrissey. I can assure you that we have been quite busy during this transition period. We have not only moved the ASHI office but have also switched the operation of the ARB as well. As with any move, there are always a few hiccups along the way, however, all in all the transition has gone quite smoothly.

While our transition to the new management firm is proceeding without significant interruption that is not to say that things have been quiet. As many of you know, CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services) requested comments on a proposed rule change that would significantly alter the qualifications for the director of a high-complexity laboratory. As is customary for these types of issues, the response time is generally short. In this instance, the proposed rule was published on Friday, December 28 and provided a response time of only 30 days. Thus, our responses had to physically be in the CMS office by January 28. Pulling a cogent response together for such a complicated issue in such a short time was not an easy task. I would like to personally thank the members of the Public Policy Committee - Andrea Zachary, Mary S. Leffell, and Louise Jacobbi - as well as Len Morrissey, for their assistance.

In addition, and for the first time, ASHI had assistance from a more professional group - MARC Associates, the government relations firm that we retained last year, who were very helpful in forming our response as well as ensuring that all responses met the deadline. I would specifically like to thank Ellen Riker and Eddie Allen of MARC Associates. As many of you know, we sent a "BLAST" e-mail to all ASHI members encouraging you to respond to the proposed rule change. As a result of our combined efforts, I am happy to say that in addition to the formal ASHI response, over 50 individuals submitted their own personal response. I would like to thank each and every one of you who took the time to submit a response. I was pleasantly surprised to see that some of our overseas ASHI members also took the time to submit a response. This is important since the proposed U.S. Government regulations would not apply to foreign laboratories. These responses were directed at the quality of individuals who direct Histocompatibility/Immunogenetics laboratories and stressed the complexity of our field and the need for appropriately qualified individuals. I think CMS received our message and now we will just have to wait and see how they respond to our comments.

Now, we will get back to work on ASHI's goals for the future. As I outlined last time, we have identified several specific areas

that we will be focusing on this year.

As you may recall the key focus areas were:

1. Membership
2. Making ourselves known
3. Scientific leadership
4. Re-Engineering ourselves
5. Re-Structuring laboratory practice



We are making strides in several of these areas and I wanted to take a moment and give you an update. First, in the area of membership, we are in the process of issuing a RFP for our journal, *Human Immunology*. We are hopeful that we will be able to negotiate a contract that will enable us to redesign membership, thereby increasing the total number of members. In the area of Scientific Leadership, we have worked with CMS, AST and ASTS to resolve the issue of non-renal laboratory testing (see article in this issue). As a follow-up to these efforts we are in the process of putting together a scientific conference with our clinical colleagues that will be designed to examine, objectively, the real issues and put forth recommendations regarding clinical practice and the use of laboratory testing. This also will be part of item #5, re-structuring laboratory practice. However, along with appropriate testing, we are also looking to the future and towards new testing that will require the expertise of individuals trained in histocompatibility and immunogenetics. Lastly, with respect to item #4, re-engineering ourselves, the first steps are underway. We will be submitting, for your approval, By-laws that will provide a new leadership structure. We are confident that this new structure will be quite functional and will provide the type of leadership that ASHI will need for the future.

We have also been working on this year's ASHI meeting. Dr. Dolly Tyan and her committee have assembled a fine program for this year. One of the main themes for this meeting will be "B-cells". There will be sessions dedicated to the ontogeny, function and regulation of these important cells. A preliminary program is included in this issue of the ASHI Quarterly. I encourage you to look it over and make your plans early to join us at the beautiful Opryland Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee.

In closing, I would just like to say thanks to all those individuals on ASHI council and the various committees for helping in our transition to the new management company. We are confident that with the new directions provided by AH, combined with the support and participation of our members, ASHI will continue its success.