

President's Column

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Dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to talk to you briefly about several important issues that directly affect ASHI and its members. The first issue is related to our new organizational structure, second is a brief overview of ASHI's financial status, third is an issue more directly related to direct competition and challenges to ASHI laboratories and last is a brief word about our future direction.

As many of you are aware, ASHI council has been working very hard to bring about significant and needed changes to ASHI's organizational structure. We began this process more than a year ago with a search for a new management company. One of the items evolved from the search process was the recognition that our current council structure was not the most efficient or effective. The current structure put too much responsibility on the office of President, and there was little design for the training of new officers. In essence, one president merely turned over the gavel to the new president and ASHI went on. Many of us on council, particularly those in line to be president, quickly realized this was not the way to run any society. Thus, during Dr. Dolly Tyan's term as president, we worked very closely on virtually all matters of the society. Similarly, I have kept both Dr. Adriana Zeevi and Dr. Sandra Rosen-Bronson closely in the loop of the society's activities. Nonetheless, the current structure did not appear to be well suited to ASHI's needs. ASHI required several changes in its structure and these changes centered on two basic concepts: 1) Continuity of leadership and 2) Better distribution of the responsibilities of the society. As such, a new structure was devised that would help maintain continuity in leadership as well as more evenly distribute the responsibilities of running ASHI. I am happy to say the membership of ASHI wholeheartedly supported this new structure and it now is officially in place. The new structure will take affect with this year's business meeting in Nashville, Tenn. We on council are certain this new structure will maintain continuity and bring balance to ASHI's leadership positions.

While developing our plans for ASHI's future, it was clear there are many arenas ASHI needs to be involved in. ASHI is comprised of unique and diverse interests that must be held together if ASHI is to survive. In order to do this, part of our restructuring plan incorporated ways to better involve the committees and committee chairs in the operation of the Society. However, as with any organization, such issues require two essential elements: people and dollars. Through our new reorganized structure we hope to provide greater opportunities for individuals to become involved in the workings of our (their) Society. To accomplish this, we are proposing some changes to our membership categories. We hope this new structure will provide a greater opportunity for individuals to become members of ASHI. Membership categories for non-doctoral individuals as well as for scientists-in-training have been revised. As membership increases, so too does our ability to provide programs, services and opportunities for our

membership. This is important if our Society is to have an impact in the areas of histocompatibility and immunogenetics, basic science and clinical applications. Unfortunately, such changes do not come without some cost. Historically, ASHI has enjoyed a solid financial picture for the base five to six years. This, in part, was due to ASHI's frugality in budgeting, as well as the strength of our investments. As we all know, the last couple of years have not been kind to investors. While ASHI's financial picture is still relatively solid, we have to be even more frugal with our operational finances. One effort to strengthen our financial picture would be to raise membership dues. This idea was met with great debate in council. However, when the debating was finished, we all agreed dues needed to be raised. This will be the first time in about 10 years we have elected to raise ASHI dues. Because of the solid historical financial picture, we were able to keep dues flat. Now however, the financial climate has significantly changed and we find that raising dues is a necessary step. We are hopeful ASHI will continue to provide substantial benefit to our members through our meeting and sponsored programs. We also are hopeful through our reorganization of the membership categories we will attract new individuals to the society who will provide new opportunities for ASHI.



The next issue is one that affects all of ASHI's clinical laboratories, particularly those involved in stem cell transplantation. Recently, the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP) launched a new initiative called "Customized HLA Typing Services." This program is designed to provide high-resolution (i.e., sequence based typing) confirmatory HLA typing services to programs that either are not affiliated directly with an HLA laboratory or who desire a faster turn-around-time for high-resolution typing. This program is not only being marketed as a time advantage to transplant programs but it is also being marketed as a cost savings for transplant programs. Marketing brochures that have been distributed by the NMDP have drawn direct cost comparisons between the Customized Typing Service and "Traditional" HLA typing services. At this time, we are not sure of the actual impact this program will have on existing HLA laboratories that support stem cell transplantation. It clearly will be center dependent. Nonetheless, this NMDP program represents clear competition for ASHI laboratories. We will keep you advised on the progress and impact of this NMDP program.

I would next like to take a brief moment and talk about some of the issues that face ASHI and our future direction. This past year we made great strides for ASHI. ASHI members have been active participants in several conferences that will have impact

upon our profession. ASHI needs to stay focused on these and many other issues. However, because of our diversity, ASHI must remain vigilant and informed in many areas of research and medicine in order to stay viable. I would just like to summarize a few of the areas where we have made concerted efforts to become involved.

For the first time, ASHI will partner with EFI and ASEATA to conduct a summer course in immunogenetics. The first course will be held in Europe with subsequent courses being held in the United States and possibly Australia. The exact locations of future meetings have not been worked out, except all agree there will be a rotation. This course will be designed for graduate students and fellows who would like to explore opportunities in immunogenetics. One thing all of our collective societies agreed on was the feeling that immunogenetics, as a discipline, needs to be brought to the forefront of medicine and research. We also agreed that one of the best ways to accomplish this goal was by educating our young and upcoming scientists. This is best done through formal courses and summer courses that have focused topics taught by world-class faculty. We are well on our way to having the first course next summer or early spring. Although it will take time, we are confident this approach is one way in which ASHI can help promote our mission of "Improving the quality of human health through the understanding and application of immunogenetics."

Additionally, ASHI is participating in a "President's" council for transplantation. This group is a collection of the presidents and executive directors of the major societies involved in transplantation and immunogenetics. Presently, participants include the presidents of AST, ASTS, NATCO, NKF and ASHI. A representative from HRSA also will sit on this council. The aim of this group is to better coordinate the resources of these societies to further our understanding of transplantation issues both scientific and legislative. Along these same lines, ASHI now will be a participating society in the FOCIS (Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies). Their Web site is: <http://www.focisnet.org/aboutfocis.html>. The next FOCIS meeting is in Paris May 15-19, 2003.

Finally, since this will be my last president's column in the ASHI quarterly, I would just like to say thanks to all of the council members, committee chairs and members who have worked so hard for ASHI this year. I think until one sits in the office of president one does not really appreciate all of the fine volunteer effort that is given to ASHI. These are the people who, in addition to running very busy clinical or research laboratories, make the time for ASHI. To these individuals I say - THANKS!! Thanks for your input and support. The only real negative feeling I have following my term is that there are not enough individuals who choose to devote this much effort to the Society. Many times during my time in office, individuals would contact me and say.... "Why doesn't ASHI do this?" or "Why doesn't ASHI do that?" I thank these individuals for their comments and then politely try and remind them THEY are ASHI and if work needs to be done there is plenty of room for more workers. Unfortunately, in any large society there are dissenting individuals. To a certain extent, challenging ASHI leadership is a good thing when the goal is the betterment of the Society. Sometimes it is not always clear that an individual's comments are really for the betterment of ASHI or for some other purpose. I would just like to remind ASHI members who have not participated in committees or served on council all of us are volunteers. Many of us have sacrificed significant personal time in a concerted effort to better our society and our profession. While we always appreciate constructive criticism as we try to do the best job possible for ASHI, malicious attacks on individuals or groups within ASHI are not productive nor warranted.

In closing, I have enjoyed my term as ASHI president and know your new President, Dr. Adriana Zeevi, will be one to keep ASHI on course. I will leave you with one of the sayings I have used during this past year - I'm not sure of the author:

"Yesterday is experience, tomorrow is hope, today is getting from one to the other the best way we can."

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