

The Telegraft: Recording the History of ISCT and Cell and Gene Therapy for 26 Years

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The Telegraft is born:

It was obvious soon after the 1992 incorporation of The International Society for Hematotherapy and Graft Engineering or ISHAGE (now the International Society for Cell & Gene Therapy or ISCT) that the organization needed a regularly published newsletter. On Cinco de Mayo in 1994, I (as ISHAGE President) visited Adrian Gee (ISHAGE Chairman of the Board) at his lab at the University of South Carolina to address several society projects. At the end of the day, we and his colleagues visited a local watering hole to celebrate the holiday. There, one of his lab members, Mary Brouillette, invented the newsletter name *The Telegraft*. (Sorry, Mary, I erroneously credited Carlos Lee with the name in a 2018 *Telegraft* editorial. I think I was remembering his tequila-inspired ideas on content.)

1994 was relatively early in the electronic age, and it seemed like a simple task, as reported in the initial issue distributed in June, to have “rapid communication to our members about the important work which the society is undertaking on your behalf” of “the activities of the *ISHAGE* board and committees, and regional, national, and international developments which will have an impact on the field”. Giuliana Pierson (University of Pennsylvania) bravely agreed to be founding editor. Diana Worthington-White (University of Florida), co-founder of the society and first ISHAGE Secretary, did her usual superb job of handling vital details of member and mailing lists and helping with issue content such as meeting agendas, pictures, etc. It was a group effort between many early society members in the early ISHAGE/ISCT spirit of “let’s put on a show”. Until 1997, Giuliana, with the help of various Head Office staff, did a superb job of herding the cats: specifically, keeping her finger on the pulse of the society and inducing officers, committee chairs, and members to supply copy.

The Telegraft first appeared in June of 1994 as a simple four page black-and-white paper issue with grainy copies of photos, and was mailed to the 471 members. It was produced in standard desk top publishing format for the era, the program name being lost in the mists of time. It was printed in Canada by the office in Vancouver. The issue’s cost was kindly supplied by Stem Cell Technologies, who would support the cost of the newsletter until November 1996. The lead story of the first issue reported the status of the major driving concern for organizing ISHAGE in the US: governmental regulation of hematopoietic cell transplantation. *The Telegraft* reported on two 1994 meetings with the FDA initiated by the ISHAGE Regulatory Action Group (Scott Rowley from the Frederic Hutchinson Cancer Center, Nancy Collins from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Richard Champlin from UCLA and Adrian Gee from the University of S. Carolina). At the meeting we introduced the ISHAGE goals which were met with enthusiasm by the FDA, and which we believe were instrumental in the FDA organizing another

April 1994 meeting (also reported in the article) with ISHAGE and 7 other stakeholders in hematopoietic cell transplantation (AABB, ASBMT, ASFA, ARC, NMDP, CCBC, AATB*). This 3rd meeting outcome was the formation the US National Task Force for establishing standards in cell therapy between the stakeholders. Scott Rowley and the ISHAGE Regulatory Committee were already writing standards for North American hematopoietic processing laboratories, so it was decided that ISHAGE would take the lead and submit their standards to other Task Force members for information, further action to be determined. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Shpall (Denver, CO) and the ISHAGE North American Laboratory Accreditation Committee were drafting a model program for lab accreditation. It was also reported that progress was being made on the other prime concern in society formation, which was the desire to be an international forum for all of hematopoietic transplantation. Josey Reiffers (France) and Ineke Slaper-Cortenbach (The Netherlands) reported that they had formed a committee to extend ISHAGE organizational efforts into the EU. Other important news was that Robert Preti (Westchester Medical Center, NY) of the Administration Committee announced an informational survey to establish a databank of the activities of member laboratories. The issue also announced that the 2nd meeting of ISHAGE would be held in Seattle in 1995, with Nobel Laureate E. Donnell Thomas as keynote speaker. Finally, increased membership statistics were presented graphically (44 members in 1992, 250 in 1993, and 471 in 1994), and a membership application rounded out the issue.

The second issue of *The Telegraft* was published in November of 1994. In the time between issue #1 and #2, ISCT and ASBMT had joined forces to create a separate but independent organization to write standards and provide accreditation for transplantation laboratories and clinical transplant units. The organization was named the Foundation for the Accreditation of Hematopoietic Cell Therapy (FAHCT), with EJ Shpall heading the ISHAGE committee developing a structure for the project. Among other important society activities announced were listing of the society Journal of Hematotherapy in Index Medicus, a Board meeting in Minneapolis, selection of liaisons between ISHAGE and AABB, solicitation for committee postings, and Bob Preti's continuing work on surveying the activities of processing labs. Importantly, the work of Josey Reiffers and Ineke Slaper-Cortenbach bore fruit in the first meeting of Euro-ISHAGE in October of 1994. In issues soon to follow, Gunnar Kvalheim and Moya Berli became forces in Euro-ISHAGE. Under the heading of North America, the FDA's Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) had established its own Task Force for regulation of stem cell activities and was working on a document outlining how they proposed to proceed. The prophetic last sentence of the short report was "The ISHAGE Regulatory Action Group is maintaining close contact with the Agency, and will advise ISHAGE members as to the effect of this FDA action on member laboratories." Little did we know then how many years of work their proposal would stimulate in North America and around the cell therapy world.

The Ones Who Make it Happen: Editors

The content and character of *The Telegraft* over the next 26 years was determined by the editor, the Editorial Board, the leadership of the society (president, chairman of the board and other officers and committee heads), and the Chief Executive Officer and management company personnel in the Head Office who put all the material together and distribute it either by mail or electronically. Table 1 is the chronological list of *Telegraft* editors, co-editors, and Editorial Board members who were credited with coordination of each issue between 1994 and 2020.

A quick perusal of the issues available on the [Telegraft Hub](#) show how in the early days of cellular therapy the society and the field of cell and gene therapy had turned its attention from a simple desire to get rid of a bad cell and replace it with a healthy cell, to strategies that may help get the world out of the current pandemic.

The current charge of the *Telegraft* is clear (as follows):

"To be a resource to our membership by communicating Society activities, important events in cell and gene therapy, and relevant original articles which educate and advance the careers of our members."

This aim is consistent with how *The Telegraft* and the society have evolved. However, there are many roads to this end, and each person involved in the production of *The Telegraft* has left their mark.

The editor has the most immediate impact in setting priorities and recognizing newsworthy content. Early editors were instrumental in setting in motion actions that are still bearing fruit. Many editors served the society on other committees and were active members of other professional societies, so their opinions and feeling for where the field was heading were informed by their other experiences. Several were or became ISCT presidents. Space is not sufficient to summarize all of the accomplishments of every editor. Below are a few highlights:

- Giuliana Pierson's tenure was one of firsts. The widely popular Tech Talk column, first written by Ellen Areman, covering practical laboratory concerns was started. This interest in the reality of bench work continues to 2020 where the Lab Practices committee reports covering these topics are usually among the most popular. In 1995 green was used for printing when it was adopted as the society color (representing growth potential of stem cells, and because there were few green journals at the time)
- Steve Noga's proximity and network with governmental regulators led him to start regular meetings with the FDA which were the forerunner of the current Cellular Therapy Liaison Meetings. He started the Editor's editorial column in 1998.
- Iain Webb expanded the *Telegraft* page number to cover many important actions like the society name change from ISHAGE to ISCT and the start of the second society journal, *Cytotherapy*. He also appointed an official Editorial Board to help with the expanded work load.

- Scott Burger's 5 year tenure saw an explosion in page number, expansion of types of coverage, society activities, meetings, better printing of photos, more ads. In 2002, the 10 year celebration issue with ISHAGE/ISCT history recorded was printed. Also, in 2002 orange was adopted as the color of ink to print the *Telegraft*. Anyone who knows the reason, please contact me!
- Bruce Levine's editorship saw another expansion of content, with font size and margins decreasing. His information-packed issues covered meetings of various types, agendas, and abstracts.
- Lynn O'Donnell, whose 8 year tenure was the longest, initiated several actions to encourage participation and education of members by introducing the featured laboratories article and highlighting individual member-focused articles. In February 2011, the newsletter ceased being paper arriving in snail mail, to being available on the society website only. In 2012, she shepherded the increase from 4 to 6 issues per year. Lynn co-edited with 2 Editorial Board members (Frederico Rodriguez for 1 issue, Deborah Griffin for 4 years).
- Deborah Griffin became sole editor for 1.5 years, utilizing her long experience with ISCT to produce increasingly sophisticated issues.
- C. Russell Cruz and Paul Eldridge produced the April 2018 issue, and C. Russell Cruz and Wouter Van't Hof produced the June 2018 issue.
- I became senior editor in Aug 2018, charged with mentoring Early Stage Professionals in newsletter/journal production. I conducted a survey of past *Telegraft* editors and board members which identified several action items, especially an effort to increase the international membership on the Editorial Board and improve content and readability to increase the click rate of members into the electronic articles.
- Long time Editorial Board members C. Russell Cruz (USA) and Janet McPherson (Australia) will assume co-editorship in Sept. 2020.

TABLE 1

<i>The Telegraft Editor and ISHAGE/ISCT Leadership serving terms between 1994-2020</i>			† = Issues published 2006 to 2008 were identified by seasons (winter, spring, summer, Fall) rather than months as in all other volumes
Editor*/ Asst Editor **/ Editorial Board member °	Dates	Society leadership	
Giuliana Pierson*	June 1994 to Feb 1997	Adrian Gee, Nancy Collins Allen Eaves	
Steve Noga*	May 1997 to May 1999	Allen Eaves, Scott Rowley	
Iain J. Webb*	Aug 1999 to May 2001	Malcolm Brenner, Robert Negrin	
Scott Burger*	Aug 2001 to Winter 2006†	Robert Negrin, Steve Noga, Donna Przepiorka	
Bruce Levine*	Summer 2006 to Summer 2008†	Shelley Heimfeld	
Lynn O'Donnell*	Fall 2008† to May 2012	Mary Laughlin, Ed Horwitz	
Lynn O'Donnell* Federico Rodriguez°	July 2012	Kurt Gunter	
Lynn O'Donnell * Deborah Griffin*	Nov 2012 to June 2016	Kurt Gunter Massimo Dominici Catherine Bollard	
Deborah Griffin*	Aug 2016 to Feb 2018	Catherine Bollard	
C. Russell Cruz** Paul Eldridge°	April 2018	Catherine Bollard	
C. Russell Cruz** Wouter Van't Hof°	June 2018	John Rasko	
Nancy Collins*	Aug 2018 to Aug 2020	John Rasko Bruce Levine	
C. Russell Cruz* Janet Macpherson*	Oct 2020 to Aug 2022	Bruce Levine	

The Ones Who Make it Happen: Editorial Board

In 1999, the increased size, structure, and content of the *Telegraft* prompted the introduction of an Editorial Board to aid the editor and Home Office staff. The editors carefully choose individuals for the Boards based on their scientific expertise and their networks among scientists and in professional organizations. The result was a larger publication with a broader reach, more contributors, and greater coverage of important developments in the cell and gene therapy world. As the *Telegraft* and the Society matured, and the Editorial Boards found their voices, the content became increasingly sophisticated, and more scientific content and commentary was published.

TABLE 2		
Members of <i>The Telegraft</i> Editorial Board serving terms between 1999-2020		
Alireza Abazari	Joyce Frey-Vasconcells	Lynn O'Donnell
Satyam Arora	Joan Garcia	Giuliana Pierson
Kimberly Benton	Deborah Griffin	H. Miles Prince
Moya Berli	Doris Herrmann	Jo Lynn Procter
Shyam Bhakta	William Janssen	Donna Regan
Elmar Burchardt	Diane Kadidlo	Federico Rodriguez
Scott Burger	Karen Nichols	Michael Scott
Anthony Carrasco-Yalan	Elizabeth Konecki	Michele Segroe
Christian Chabannon	Ashley Krull	Karen Snow
Lakshmi Chelluri	Cor Lamers	Wouter Van't Hof
Nancy H. Collins	Anne Lamontagne	Joaquim Vives
C. Russell Cruz	Erika Lapinskas	Edwin Wagena
Rounak Dubey	Bruce Levine	Dominic Wall
Paul Eldridge	Tracey Lodie	Iain Webb
Luis Fernando de Silva Bouzas	Kathy Loper	Darin Weber
Lisa Beth Ferstenberg	Janet Macpherson	Claudia Zylberberg
Miguel Forte	Steve Noga	

Table 2 is a list of 50 people who have served on the Editorial Board from 1999-2020. Their service, including attending conference calls at very inconvenient local times, has materially contributed to the quality of the material published in the *Telegraft*.

The Ones Who Make it Happen: Society leadership

Also listed on Table 1 are the ISHAGE/ISCT leaders from 1994 to 2020 during the various editor terms. *The Telegraft* is the voice of the society leadership and the record of their influence. Adrian Gee as

founder and first Chairman of the Board was the driving force behind ISHAGE/ISCT, and his influence is behind the actions reported in the early *Telegrafts*. His editorial skills as co-editor of the first society journal “*The Journal of Hematotherapy*” set the standard of writing that the newsletter had to meet. I was so grateful for Adrian’s foresight and organizational skill during my tenure as first president which coincided with Adrian’s term as Chairman of the Board. The society was designed such that decisions about society actions, including what we needed from the newsletter, were mutually agreed upon. As I recall, my primary participation with the *Telegraft* was to help organize its start, and then convince Giuliana to be our founding editor, and finally to help in suggestions of article content. Allen Eaves, ISHAGE second president, made invaluable contributions to the society in scientific, organizational, management, and budgetary arenas. His experience in operating commercial ventures contributed to the overall running of the society, including the production of the newsletter. Stem Cell Technologies supported the society in many ways such as the publication of the newsletter. To find out more about the society during the terms of the 11 presidents whose terms fell between Allen Eaves and John Rasko, I suggest you refer to the *Telegraft* Archives. The online library is incomplete, but the Head Office is in the process of compiling data on every issue.

Immediate Past President John Rasko impacted the production of *Telegraft* by his desire to mentor members of the Early Stage Professional Committee in scientific communication. When he approached me to edit the publication in 2018, he suggested that some members of the Early Stage Professional Committee could be mentored by the editor and the more experienced Board members. During my two-year term, we added ESPs from various countries to the Editorial Board (which also helped fulfill the national diversity goal for the *Telegraft*). In addition to requiring they participate in creative and practical planning for each issue, we required that they work with an Editing Group, to practice the art of clear, concise communication. Most ISCT members are trained in scientific writing, but journalistic writing (inverted pyramid template) and editorial or opinion writing has a different purpose and format. Practicing all three strengthens a scientist’s ability to communicate with other scientists and with the public.

The current president (and former *Telegraft* editor), Bruce Levine, has had consistent input into *The Telegraft* since his election. Bruce is famous for his participation in social media. He has suggested the newest addition to the *Telegraft* family of publications: ***Reports from the Frontlines #ISCTtogether***, a special listing of posts from Twitter and other electronic platforms about our members and their professional and personal experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ones Who Make it Happen: Management Team

The young, enthusiastic Malachite Management team in Vancouver was the society management team for many years. At different times, different individuals had the responsibility of producing the newsletter. I have not been able to track the team members who were responsible for the *Telegraft* during the various editorial terms.

The ISCT Management Team also coordinates a special part of the *Telegraft* family of publications during annual meetings, as of ISCT London 2017. Certain members are asked to produce copy for the *Telegraft Live*, a blog reporting on the various parts of the meeting. This engaging and popular exercise is authored by young attendees, whose observations are a service to members.

In 2017, ISCT took over its own management, and Meagan Pasternak has since been the Head Office liaison for the *Telegraft*. Meagan has been one of the most efficient staff members I have ever worked with. Her organization, patience, attention to detail, and commitment to doing the job right are truly exceptional. She recently passed the *Telegraft* mantle to Ken Ip, whose expertise with all things electronic will undoubtedly help Russell Cruz and Janet MacPherson as they assume the role of co-editors for the October 2020 issue.

It has been an honor to be senior editor of the *Telegraft* for the past two years, following in the footsteps of some remarkable people. ISCT, its members, leadership, and management continue to amaze me with their shared history and on-going dedication, resourcefulness, and energy. In the current pandemic, I am more proud than ever that I count such impressive people as friends and colleagues. What we do, what ISCT does, and what *The Telegraft* reports, moves the world forward in the face of truly frightening odds. Thank you.

Footnotes:

* AABB= American Association of Blood Banks, ASBMT=American Society for Blood and Marrow Transplantation, ASFA= American Societies for Apheresis, ARC= American Red Cross, NMDP= National Marrow Donor Program, CCBC= Clinical Community Blood Centers, AATB=American Association of Tissue Banks

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