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International Society ISCT Cell & Gene Therapy

TELEGRAFT

MEMBER NEWSLETTER

ISCT Leadership

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ISCT became my preferred professional society after I attended my first annual meeting – ISHAGE 2001 in Quebec City. As a research scientist with skills in cell culture and genetic engineering of viral vectors, I was working with a small dedicated team to move retroviral gene-modified hematopoietic stem cells from Phase I safety studies in Australia to an international, randomized controlled Phase II study. That first meeting was very interactive, with leaders freely sharing their knowledge to advance the field. I learnt so much in the following years, particularly by attending the ISCT AABB Somatic Cell Therapy meetings that were focused on the evolving regulatory aspects of Cell Therapy. Attendance at these International meetings provided the opportunity to meet scientists, clinicians and regulators from around the globe, and many firm friendships and professional relationships were formed, including Bruce Levine, Lynn O'Donnell, Lizette Caballero, Scott Burger, Shelly Heimfeld and many more. These role models showed me that it doesn't take much to help others, and that sharing that time and debating opinions make for a strong collegial organization. ISCT is an organization that I wanted to be part of and help grow.

My role at J&J was a steep learning curve at first; as a small biotech inside large pharma we were advised to use global resources, but kept coming back to doing it ourselves – we were more nimble and committed to the project. I was able to take a leadership role across gene therapy product management, process development and GMP manufacturing as well as in managing clinical trials submissions and reporting. This experience was recognized within J&J by participation on due diligence teams, and working with a global taskforce for advancing regulatory change in Advanced Therapies, and as a member of strategic planning meetings with senior directors and the Scientific Advisory Board.

In 2009, I found myself with spare time, while I started a fledgling consultancy. This time allowed me to give back to ISCT. Together with our current president John Rasko, and ISCT Lab practices stalwart Pam Dyson, and Dominic Wall (past regional VP) we shaped the formation of the inaugural ANZ regional committee and commenced the locally convened and managed Annual ANZ regional meetings. We have held a meeting every year, except in 2013 when the ISCT Annual meeting was in Auckland. I formally joined the ISCT leadership in 2011 as regional secretary, followed by 2 years as regional VP elect, 2 years

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as regional VP, and now as past regional VP. During this time I have engaged widely with the ANZ cell therapy community and built credibility across all 3 pillars of ISCT. During this time I have contributed as an editor to Telegraft, planning and participation of the Global Regulatory Perspectives pre-meeting workshop, Annual meeting scientific programs and abstract review, Co-chair with Oscar Lee of the 2016 Singapore meeting and mentor to Early Stage Professionals.

In 2010 I took on the challenge to set up a completely new facility for cell and gene therapy at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, with John Rasko. I learned much about engineering and cleanroom facility design, and built a team of production scientists, quality specialists and clinical trials co-ordinators to deliver novel cell and gene therapy products for a range of clinical indications, beyond hematologic malignancy, and extended services to other hospitals in the Sydney region.

For the past 12 months I have immersed myself in a new role as Cell & Gene Therapy Specialist for GE Healthcare Life Sciences across ANZ. I attended the ISCT 2020 Melbourne meeting as a Sponsor! I continue to engage on the ANZ regional committee, as Telegraft editor and as Mentor. I now have the opportunity to work across organizations in ANZ to support current and emerging cell and gene therapy development, reconnecting with many friends made through ISCT over the years both locally and globally.

Working in Cell & Gene therapy is rewarding and I really enjoy what I do. The driver for remaining in the sector and exploring new ventures is that there are patients who need treatment options that are just around the corner. It is our responsibility to develop products, with compliant manufacturing methods, robust product characterization, and well designed and documented clinical trials to demonstrate the safety and efficacy profile. We engage effectively with our clinical, scientific, regulatory and commercial colleagues. Our dialogue with consumers has commenced, advocating against unapproved therapies, and can be extended by including representatives in clinical research design and analysis. When was the last time you asked a patient what outcome would be meaningful for them if they agree to a novel intervention? Let's make our world of cell & gene therapy even more meaningful.

Thank you ISCT for helping me to see that I have a voice, and can overcome imposter syndrome.
I am passionate about the patient voice, promoting women in STEM, greater diversity and representation generally, but especially on scientific programs.

Follow me on LinkedIn, hear me tweet @jmacpher, let me know what other channels you use.