

The Importance of the “I” in ISCT

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Happy 2020, and welcome to the 27th volume of the *Telegraft*! This year we are in the process of implementing changes designed to enhance the value of this newsletter to ISCT members and increase its profile in the regenerative medicine community.

From the beginning, “International” was an important descriptor in the name of this society (first the International Society for Hematotherapy and Graft Engineering, then International Society for Cell Therapy, then the International Society of Cell & Gene Therapy). The “I” has been both the definition of who we are, what the society aspires to address, and identifies its most important opportunity to do good and make its stamp in the crowded field of scientific societies.

In the 1980’s, the field of transplant concerned itself mainly with basic research or clinical applications. When I entered the field in those years, there were so few transplant centers, collection facilities, and laboratories that most of the practitioners in North American and Europe knew one another by name/reputation or face. There was no common voice for the rather small subsection of clinical and basic researchers who wanted to translate basic research findings to clinical usage in transplantation, and then to address the reality of how to develop, market, and use cells as drugs. So ISHAGE was formed to be that voice.

Our society was founded to be international by necessity. We all needed as much input as possible, and this created a sense of common purpose. Each national group was nervous about how their own country’s legislators would approach and regulate our field, so we all watched closely what happened elsewhere in the world in our field and in the news. Advances in thought, medicine, and devices were not necessarily constrained by national borders. The pioneering work in unrelated transplant and donor groups made international cooperation imperative by the necessity of moving patients, donors, and their cell products across international boundaries.

At the first organized meeting of ISHAGE an afternoon session was set aside for participants to meet in geographic groups. Off we trotted in high spirits to meet with our colleagues from the same geographical or national area. In retrospect, it was not surprising that we found out that while the aims of all the regional groups were mostly similar (protect patients, promote responsible research and clinical studies, liaison with regulators to communicate the unique nature of cell based treatments),

there was wide variation as to where each geographic area was on the continuum of little or high regulation, and an even wider variation in procedures to be undertaken in order to achieve our goals within each national and regional political unit.

We as professionals and a society have matured hugely since 1992 and ISCT has become adept at recognizing and working with the differences between national or regional groups. ISCT set up regional committees and elected officers responsible for watching and responding to developments in the various areas. The ISCT annual meeting showcases the Global Regulatory Perspectives Workshop designed to provide participants with viewpoints and perspectives from international regulators of cell therapy products. ISCT embraces its fundamental commitment to promoting international sharing of scientific and clinical knowledge - and the *Telegraft* does its part. Three of the ISCT Legal and Regulatory Affairs Committees (North America, EU and near-by countries, and Australia/New Zealand) provide “Watchdog” articles in each issue which report on recent regulatory activity. The *Telegraft* reports on and provides links to material from each regional meeting, and other meetings elsewhere that ISCT either sponsors or co-sponsors in places like [Australia](#), [Singapore](#), or [South and Central America](#). The *Telegraft* also reports important news from standards setting organizations whose operations occur within various national boundaries, like FACT, JACIE, and NetCORD. The ISCT Presidential Task Force on the Use of Unproven and/or Unethical Cell & Gene Therapies must deal with the complexities of medical tourism in various countries and provide guidance in an ever changing political climate. However, much ISCT’s *Telegraft* has done in the past to fulfill our global commitment, the *Telegraft* editors and Editorial Board think we can do still more.

Over the next year we want to increase the international character of this publication. We are increasing the number of members of our Editorial Board who work outside of North America. We will expand our coverage of the activity of the Regional Committees (this issue features a [report from the Europe Regional Executive Committee](#)) and pay special attention to the areas of world where we want to increase our outreach, like Africa, Central and South America, and areas of the Asia and the Pacific Rim. Importantly, we are raising the profile of the *Telegraft* by establishing its own website. This will make the information we publish easier to find by the various search engines for members and non-members alike. We are especially indebted to Associate Editor Dr. Russell Cruz for his leadership in this effort.

We need international knowledge and cooperation now more than ever for advancement of cell and gene therapy. ISCT and its voice, the *Telegraft* aims to help fill that need.