

**From the President's Desk:
Building Roads to Scientific Advancement, Professional Development, and
Inclusive Diversity in Cell and Gene Therapy**

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Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I say “and” because that is the heart of ISCT, contacts made and long friendships developed. We are interdependent with each other for professional development, and for the development of our field of cell and gene therapy to benefit patients worldwide.

ISCT professionals are trained to expect disruption. Our first ever Virtual Meeting was a crash course in adapting to disruption, made necessary by tragic circumstances around the globe from the COVID-19 pandemic. The spirit of call to action and adaptability was exemplified in the conception and execution of this meeting from the ISCT Head Office to the Co-Chairs to the Organizing Committee, speakers, exhibitors, and attendees. The ISCT Paris 2020 Virtual Platform leveraged top-of-the-line technology allowing for the [engagement of our global membership](#) around the clock and around the world. By catapulting into the future, we have been fortunate to be able to engage with members and attendees who would not have been able to attend an in person meeting.

That is the spirit of ISCT which is testified to by the record number of new ISCT members and record attendance any ISCT meeting in history- in person or virtual.

We are part of a community dedicated to the betterment of healthcare on an international scale. We also share a commitment to protecting, preserving, and saving lives. Our community is diverse by nature, and this inclusive diversity is a strength that characterizes our Society.

The movement for justice and equality affects us all, but there are instances of discrimination that each of us do not read about and do not see. I share here a short passage from an email from a close black male colleague:

“In addition to the stress of the current moment, we are friends on social media with many of our co-workers and have seen posts calling us “animals” . . . How can black students/postdocs/staff/faculty be expected to work side-by-side with other employees that have displayed such racist disregard for our lives and for our pain?”

It pains me to see that harassment such as this persists, especially amongst my colleagues. Silence is assent. I must therefore add my voice to those speaking out. I recognize that I personally have blind spots. I pledge to oppose discrimination and hate through active allyship, continuous unlearning, learning, and listening.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do, that we can do, to make this easier for our members who have faced, or are facing discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

This is a moment where change demands honest support, through both compassionate ears and loud voices. This support must not cease, and it must come from as many directions as possible, so I implore you to speak and hear where you can, and to help bridge the gap of inequality where you are able.

ISCT is all about a sense of community and members helping members. Those are our core values. In the book *Give and Take – Why Helping Others Drives Our Success*, author Adam Grant of the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania describes three types of reciprocity styles of people. Professionally, most people tend to be “matchers” by implicitly counting their favors received and given, some people are “takers”, and some are “givers”. One might suppose that givers tend to be left behind professionally, but the opposite is true because you cannot predict who may be able to help you in the future. Giving inspires trust. And, biblical sages teach that the highest form of wisdom is kindness.

The single most important piece of professional advice I have learned is the importance of networking, connections, and collaborations. Cell and gene therapy is impossible without collaborations. We are interdependent. Our core values require ensuring equality of opportunity.

You all know that ISCT began charting a path for cell and gene therapy translation decades ago. If there is no road, cell and gene therapy professionals know how to build one. For our new members, welcome and dive in to all that ISCT has to offer! To all of our members, I am honored to serve as your President and look forward to the road we will build together!