

Mucosal immunology: a frontier no longer

In 1988, the late Charles Janeway, in an editorial on the unique $\gamma\delta$ T-cell receptor usage of cells at epithelia, described these surfaces as the “frontiers of the immune system.” At that time, describing mucosal immunology in this manner presciently portrayed both the challenges for the immune system at the interface with the external environment and the opportunities for immunologists in what was then a niche discipline. Indeed, between 1980 and 1990, only 400 papers were listed in PubMed as being related to mucosal immunology. However, after the 1990 “gold rush” on this immunologic frontier, the number ballooned to approximately 1,000 such papers between 1990 and 2000 and more than 15,000 papers between 2000 and 2007, making mucosal immunology one of the hottest areas in immunobiology. It has evolved into a field that makes major contributions to our fundamental understanding of global infections such as human immunodeficiency virus, the importance of developing effective mucosal vaccines, immune regulation and its relationship to inflammation, a wide variety of diseases of mucosal tissues such as asthma and inflammatory bowel disease, and the immunologic importance of epithelial cells.

The Society for Mucosal Immunology (SMI) was established in 1987 with the mission of promoting excellence in research and education in mucosal immunology and fostering communication among immunologists studying the unique nature of the mucosal immune system that characterizes the epithelial surfaces of the gut, lungs, upper airways, and genitourinary tracts. SMI was the logical ramification of a series of international congresses in mucosal immunology started in 1973 by Jiri Mestecky and Jerry McGhee from Birmingham, Alabama, which were followed by the formation of an organizing committee in 1985 at the Niagara Falls meeting. This group consisted of many of the founding fathers and mothers of the discipline, including the late Anne Ferguson (Scotland), John Bienenstock (Canada), Jiri Mestecky (USA), Pearay Ogra (USA), Robert Clancy (USA), Warren Strober (USA), Per Brandtzaeg (Norway), Charles Elson (USA), and many others whom, unfortunately, we do not have space to mention. From this foundation emerged an international society that has grown to 700 members from more than 38 countries.

SMI and its members have been responsible for the organization of 13 international meetings, including the 2007 meeting in Tokyo, Japan, as well as a larger number of satellite meetings in the United States, Europe, and Australia. It has also been responsible for the creation of a textbook, *Mucosal Immunology*,

which is now in its third edition. Most excitingly, as evidence of its emergence as an important discipline in its own right—and on the twentieth anniversary of the Society—SMI, together with Nature Publishing Group, has launched a new flagship journal, *Mucosal Immunology*, which represents years of development initiated by Warren Strober and Hiroshi Kiyono (SMI Presidents, 2002–2007), is being ably led by Brian Kelsall (USA), Paul Garside (Scotland), and Jo Viney (USA). The journal is a major achievement and challenge for the Society, as well as for the hundreds of investigators who have contributed to and focused attention on this important field with all its scientific challenges and opportunities.

The governing board of SMI, which includes Hiroshi Kiyono (Japan), Leo Lefrancois (USA), Charlotte Kaetzel (USA), Ken Beagley (Australia), Maria Rescigno (Italy), Allan Mowat (Scotland), Martin Kagnoff (USA), Phillip Smith (USA), and Dale Umetsu (USA), will aim to ensure that the journal serves as a new home for publications by investigators studying and carrying out research in mucosal immunology as well as providing education in broader aspects of the field. To all who have contributed to the development of this journal and the Society’s prosperity, we congratulate you. To all who wish to participate more vigorously in the Society and this exciting field, we welcome you.

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