

Conference Report

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41st Annual scientific meeting of the International Spinal Cord Society (former International Medical Society of Paraplegia) and 28th annual scientific meeting of the American Spinal Injury Association Vancouver, BC Canada, 3–6 May 2002

Earlier this year Vancouver hosted the 1st Joint Annual Meeting of the International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS) and the American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA). It was one of the biggest meetings of spinal cord injuries professionals from all over the world, bringing together more than 600 delegates from 37 countries.

The Scientific Committee of ISCoS, chaired by Dr John Ditunno, and the Programme Committee of ASIA, chaired by Dr Marca Sipski, had worked in parallel and together with the Vancouver Local Organising Committee, co-chaired by Dr Peter Wing and Dr Claire Weeks, provided an outstanding agenda of scientific presentations, posters, lectures, courses and workshops, as well as a very active social programme.

The meeting was officially opened by the presidents of ISCoS and ASIA, Prof T Ikata and Dr Daniel Lammertse, followed by a lively presentation by Rick Hansen of the Man in Motion Institute.

The scientific programme was divided into a variety of main topics, ranging from basic science to latest clinical advances in spinal cord medicine. The ASIA's scientific programme included: Regeneration Research, Urological Considerations, Surgical Spine Stabilisation, Outcomes Research, Rehabilitation Responses and Women's Issues, and the ISCoS's: Depression & Suicide Prevention, Employment Issues, Gait/ambulation Analysis, Paediatrics and Neurophysiological Testing. Together with the free papers there were 105 oral and 179 poster presentations in total, with abstracts published in the Abstract Compendium. Because of the high number of oral presentations they had to be split into concurrent sessions, often up to four at a time, very well organised and running smoothly. Unfortunately, this did not always allow delegates to attend all the sessions they might have wanted to hear first hand.

Both ASIA and ISCoS had invited speakers from the field of neuroregeneration for their respective lectureships. The Distinguished G Heiner Sell Lecture, entitled 'Fighting the consequences of spinal cord injury by harnessing the immune system: prospects for therapeutic vaccination', was given by Prof Michal Schwartz of the Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel. Prof Schwartz, who has developed the concept of protective autoimmunity, talked about the

beneficial role of the immune system in neuroprotection and possibly repair of the injured central nervous system.

The Sir Ludwig Guttmann Lecture was given by Dr James Fawcett of the Cambridge University Centre for Brain Repair, UK, who also is the chairman of the Scientific Committee of the International Spinal Research Trust. Dr Fawcett gave a very thorough review of the current state of research into spinal cord regeneration: the progress that has been made in the basic science of axon regeneration, translating these experimental therapies to humans and the ways in which treatment of spinal injury patients might progress. His lecture entitled 'Repair of spinal cord injuries: where are we, where are we going?' will be in full in this issue of *Spinal Cord*.

There were four preconference workshops: 'Working toward an International SCI data set', 'Sexual rehabilitation and fertility', 'New techniques for restoring function' and 'Advanced spinal surgery'. The first one, 'Working toward an International SCI data set', was by invitation only and brought together representatives from 12 countries with experience in data management. The objectives of the workshop were (1) To develop a common understanding of existing spinal cord injury databases around the world and (2) To establish partnerships for developing a standardised international data set for spinal cord injury. The work will continue in five committees and will be presented at the next ISCoS and ASIA meetings.

There were another seven instructional courses throughout the meeting incorporated into the scientific programme.

A number of awards was presented to delegates and presenting authors at the end of the meeting, among them two very prestigious awards: The ASIA Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Dr Kristijan Ragnarsson of Mt. Sinai Medical Centre in New York, USA and the ISCoS Annual Medal to Mr Wagih El Masri of the Spinal Centre in Oswestry, UK.

As always, there were exhibits of pharmaceutical products and technical equipment during the conference, but this time there was an additional attraction – the Vancouver Showcase. It was an informal exhibition of local experts and supports working to promote healthy community integration options for people with spinal cord injury. Vancouver itself certainly is, not just one of the most beautiful, but also one of the most accessible and wheelchair friendly cities in North America.

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