European Journal of Human Genetics (2017) 25, S37–S38

www.nature.com/ejhg

PERSPECTIVE

Commemoration of 15 years ESHG SPC member and chair from 2009 to 2016

Brunhilde Wirth

European Journal of Human Genetics (2017) **25,** S37–S38; doi:10.1038/ejhg.2017.151

In 2003, Andrew Read invited me as a speaker in a splicing session at the European Society of Human Genetics (ESHG) meeting in Birmingham. I then realized this meeting might be worth attending in future. Before this, I regularly attended the American Society of Human Genetics meetings and was only once at the ESHG 1997 meeting in Genoa. That same year I was a local SPC member for the ESHG 2004 meeting in Munich, a small committee with Andrew as chair. Thereafter, I became a regular SPC member. Han Brunner took over the chair from Andrew Read in 2006. One of the changes made in those days was introducing the educational track. Our work as SPC members was mainly paper based; we did not yet have an electronic system. To prepare the meeting, we met twice: first time to select the invited speakers and invite them, and a second time to select the best abstracts and prepare sessions. This took several days of friendly chaos with a good outcome. The meeting grew from year to year and reached around 1800 attendees in Gothenburg when I took over the chair from Han, co-chairing with him the first year.

During my period as a chair we changed the evaluation system and the way in which the invited speakers were chosen. Jerome del Picchia and his Vienna Medical Academy team were extremely helpful. Jerome kept an excellent record of all activities and it was very easy to get the information needed. Together we designed and implemented an electronic system and improved this yearly to an efficient, professional and reliable system. Each of the SPC members got 300–400 abstracts to score electronically. We included additional external reviewers (scientists and ESHG board members). In the end, every single abstract was scored by 7–12 people to get a robust pre-meeting evaluation. The best evaluated 5% of the abstracts made it to an oral presentation.

For the invited speakers, each SPC member made written proposals in advance, so that before or at the meeting speakers could be easily added to relevant sessions. The young investigator candidates were similarly selected electronically, with many more evaluators to make this as fair as possible. Due to the streamlining of the processes we could reduce the duration of the SPC meetings, and thereby the cost. The money saved was put into more fellowships for young scientists and more awards for best presenting speakers or poster presenters.

The attendance increased from around 1800 in Gothenburg to 3500 in Barcelona. Abstract submissions increased from 1718 to 2716, and we could no longer accommodate all of them. Initially, we set a more stringent cutoff for the rejected and less good abstracts, which were only allowed as a printed version, while later electronic posters were introduced.

The meeting became more and more attractive not only for Europeans but scientists from all over the world. People love to come to this meeting based on its high-quality programme, great networking, wonderful places in Europe and the unforgettable ESHG parties.

I am honoured that I was able to serve the ESHG for 15 years as an SPC member and I am proud that we could propagate and advance the success of the ESHG meeting. It was a wonderful experience and there were unforgettable moments with a lot of excellent SPC members. It is like a big nice family that I look forward to meeting every year. I can encourage everybody to be a part of it!

University of Cologne, Institute of Human Genetics, Institute of Genetics and Center for Molecular Medicine Cologne, Cologne, Germany
E-mail: brunhilde.wirth@uk-koeln.de

Brunhilde Wirth, PhD, is a Professor of Human Genetics and Chair of the Institute of Human Genetics at the Medical Faculty of the University of Cologne in Germany. She graduated at the Faculty of Biology at the University of Bucharest in 1982, specialized in Applied Genetics in 1983, and subsequently worked as a Biology teacher at the Grammar School in Romania for 2 years before she moved to Germany in 1985. She gained a PhD at the Institute of Human Genetics at the University of Bonn in 1989. Before becoming an independent group leader in 1990, she spent 1 year of post doc at the Imperial Cancer Research Laboratories in London in the group of Professor Annemarie Frischauf. Brunhilde Wirth worked from 1990 to 2003 at the Institute of Human Genetics in Bonn and received her *venia legendi* in Human Genetics and her speciality in Human Genetics in 1996. She was appointed as Chair of the Institute of Human Genetics at the Medical Faculty of the University of Cologne in 2003, where she had the challenging opportunity to build up an entirely new Institute. Her main scientific interests are neurogenetics, molecular basis of diseases, epigenetics, therapy and modifying genes. Her particular focus is spinal muscular atrophy (SMA). Professor Wirth contributed with over 150 original, review papers and book chapters in this field and succeeded in making breakthrough contributions on the way from the gene to therapy of SMA and discovering new disease causing genes for motor neuron and bone disorders. Her group successfully identified a first full protective SMA-modifying gene. Brunhilde Wirth served on the board of the German Society of Human Genetics from 2002 to 2006, has been SPC member of the ESHG from 2004 to 2017. Between 2009 and 2016 she has been the chair of the scientific program committee of the ESHG. She serves on various national and international grant committees. Brunhilde Wirth loves teaching and education of students and has become—as a successor of Prof Victor McKusick—the co-director of the European School of Medical Genetics in 2009.