The ISN's Fellowship Program: investing in the global future of nephrology

John Feehally

When the International Society of Nephrology's (ISN's) Fellowship Program was launched in 1982, it was the first step in providing support for young physicians in the developing world to gain the training they needed to help build nephrology programs in their home countries. The Fellowship Program is now an integral part of COMGAN—the Commission for the Global Advancement of Nephrology—which drives the ISN's program for building global capacity.

The Fellowship Program focuses on excellence. The best young nephrologists are offered a short period of training in a host facility before returning to their home center to put their new skills into action. This strategy is helping to train the future leaders of nephrology in each country, so that maximum long-term benefit can be derived from the ISN's short-term investment. More than 80% of past ISN Fellows have returned home, and many are now national and regional leaders in nephrology.

Since the program was launched in 1982, nearly 400 nephrologists from 70 countries have received training in 19 host countries. A quarter of these Fellowships have been granted in the past 4 years as the program has grown. In 2006 the Fellowship Program will have a US\$1 million budget, funded by the ISN with generous support from regional and national nephrology societies and corporate partners.

Applications are welcomed from nephrologists from all low-income and middle-income countries. Standard fellowships are for 12 months; these can sometimes be extended for a second year. Short-term fellowships (3 or 6 months) are also awarded. Decisions are made by the the ISN's Fellowship Committee, which includes nephrologists from North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia. The

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Committee takes into account the quality of the candidate, the support of both the home and host centers, and the appropriateness of the proposed training.

The ISN Fellowship Program is expanding and evolving in several ways to help meet the global needs of nephrology; for example, by working more closely with the Renal Sister Center Program under the auspices of COMGAN. Through Fellowships, the development of individual nephrology leaders is promoted; through Sister Centers, facilities of excellence are established that can be the regional focus for training and research. An increasing proportion of short-term Fellows will be placed in Sister Centers (of course, applicants not working in Sister Centers are still most welcome).

Over the years the majority of host centers training ISN Fellows have been in North America, Europe and Australasia. Now there are more opportunities for ISN Fellows to be trained in centers of excellence in their own region, where culture and language are familiar. Working with regional and national nephrology societies, the ISN plans to further expand these opportunities.

Not all Fellowship applicants find it easy to identify a host center that can offer them suitable training. The ISN will soon be offering a matching initiative through which staff at the Society's headquarters can put candidates in touch with centers that are willing to accept ISN Fellows and are equipped to meet their training needs.

To learn more about the ISN's Fellowship Program, log on to the ISN Nephrology Gateway (www.isn-online.org), email me (jf27@le.ac.uk) or contact An Devriese at ISN Global Headquarters (an@associationhq.com).