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► **COVER:** "Close encounters" by Olivier Schwartz (e-mail: schwartz@pasteur.fr)



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The immune system is central to the prevention of infection and malignancies, and our understanding of this system is key to the development of effective vaccines and therapies. This is well known among immunologists but the importance of this discipline is often underestimated by the general public. Why is this so? The answer lies in communication. As Rudyard Kipling once said: "Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind."

Immunology has its own unique language, and translating it to the general public, as well as to science policy makers and politicians, can be a tricky business. This can be especially evident in the portrayal of scientific research by the media. For immunologists, one of the most pertinent examples is the decline in childhood vaccination in recent years due to misleading or inaccurate media reports. How immunologists communicate their message, both to the general public and to their scientific peers, is crucial in ensuring that immunological research receives the support it needs to promote public health.

In an effort to raise awareness of immunology among the general public, decision makers from science and politics, and teachers and students, the Day of Immunology was established by the European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) in 2005. On 29 April 2007, the EFIS joins forces with the International Union of Immunological Societies to create a global forum for information exchange and to strengthen public awareness. The onus is now on us, as immunologists, to seize this opportunity to engage with the general public and to promote immunology in a positive manner.

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