ISBER President's Message: ISBER's 20th Anniversary—Celebrating the Journey

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THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR BIOLOGICAL and Environmental Repositories (ISBER) is celebrating an important milestone this year, its 20th anniversary. It represents more than just the passage of time. It is the culmination of two decades of creativity, innovation, and growth. This anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect upon the cherished memories of years gone by while celebrating another year of serving our members, our community, and our success.

The year 1999 was notable for many reasons. It was the year that the world awaited the consequences of the Y2K bug with millennial theorists warning of Armageddon, the number of Internet users reached 150 million worldwide with >50% from the United States, and a determined group of far-sighted academics, NIH representatives, patient advocates, and lawyers with a bold vision to develop an international society that would focus on the development of standards to harmonize the collection and storage of specimens for future research established the ISBER. ISBER's vision has evolved through the years as it strives to be recognized as the leading global forum that addresses key challenges relevant to biological and environmental repositories by promoting harmonized high quality standards, education, ethical principles, and innovation in the science and management of biorepositories.

What started as a modest desire to hold annual meetings to share knowledge in the field of biobanking led to the development of a quintessential international biobanking society, the mission of which is to create opportunities for networking, education, innovations, and harmonization of scientific, technical, legal, and ethical approaches to evolving challenges in biological and environmental repositories. Meetings have expanded to address areas such as biospecimen science, informed consent, informatics, rare diseases, and automated repositories to name a few.

ISBER continues to build on its successes by strengthening partnerships with affiliated organizations to increase its global footprint. The second Biospecimen Research Symposium held in Berlin, Germany, from February 5 to 6, 2019, in partnership with the German Biobank Node, is an excellent example of such an effort, as it followed the success of the first symposium held in Luxembourg in 2018.

The 2-day event kicked off with a biobank site visit at the Central Biomaterial Bank of the Charité (ZeBanC), led by Professor Dr. Michael Hummel and Dr. Alexandra Stege. The delegates were taken on a tour inside one of the first wooden frame construction laboratory buildings in Germany. The symposium was officially opened following the biobank site visit, after a warm welcome from the program committee chairs Professor Dr. Michael Hummel and Dr. Cristina Villena, who introduced Dr. Helen Moore as the keynote speaker. The symposium consisted of three plenary sessions covering all major types of specimens, and presenting recent findings and developments in the field of biospecimen research science. The 2-day symposium was well attended, with 125 delegates representing 25 countries.

The International Biobanking Conference in Doha Qatar, held from March 25 to 27, 2019, attracted >800 delegates, which included a strong ISBER presence. The conference was organized jointly by the Qatar Biobank and the European, Middle Eastern, and African Society for Biopreservation and Biobanking (ESBB), and was supported by ISBER and Biobanks and Biomolecular Resources Research Infrastructure Consortium (BBMRI-ERIC). The theme of the 3-day meeting was "Quality Matters: A global discussion in Qatar." A number of presentations featured genomics, personalized medicine, population biobanking, and the impact of biobanking in medical research as presented by speakers from around the world. Some of the concepts discussed included the pursuit of high quality in all aspects of biobanking, as this allows the downstream embedding of artificial intelligence in biobanking operations, the return of accurate/appropriate incidental findings, and the utilization of collected samples in the health care ecosystem from basic research to clinical use. ISBER hosted a session on international best practices and standards in biobanking. Dr. Nahla Afifi, Director of the Qatar Biobank, in collaboration with partners led various committees organizing the conference. A highlight of the conference was a tour of the Qatar Biobank.

ISBER had the opportunity to host its first meeting in Shanghai, China, from May 5 to 11, 2019, partnering with two affiliate organizations in China: the Biobank Branch, China Medicinal Biotechnology Association and China National Gene Bank. To showcase the achievements of the

society and its members, the Scientific Program Advisory Committee chose “ISBER’s 20th Anniversary: Honoring Our Past, Celebrating the Present, and Envisioning Our Future” as the meeting theme. The conference provided a global platform for detailed and comprehensive discussion and collaboration on important biobanking and biopreservation activities. The conference brought together biobanking experts, scientists, policy makers, and patient advocates to discuss the future challenges for biobanking, including global harmonization, best practices, reproducibility of data, and environmental issues in an effort to enhance and foster networking and international collaboration. The conference sessions highlighted ideas and innovations from the best and the brightest in biobanking and related fields.

The conference also featured two half-day workshops designed to provide technicians in China and elsewhere information on important aspects of biobanking and the value of ISBER membership. The morning session Biobanking 101 was dedicated to biobanking design and management, and the afternoon session was dedicated to technician-level participants discussing Sample Data Management and Quality Assessment/Quality Control (QA/QC)—Benchmarking Data for Quality Metrics.

Another example of ISBER’s effort to expand its global reach is its collaboration with the Society for Cryobiology, which resulted in this year’s release of an addendum to ISBER’s fourth edition of “Best Practices: Recommendations for Repositories—The Liquid Nitrogen-Based Cryogenic Storage of Specimens” during the ISBER Annual Meeting in Shanghai. Other benefits include additional collaborations, exposure to cutting-edge research and new information, and opportunities to learn from one another and apply that information to distinct disciplines.

ISBER’s board of directors (BOD) continues to work with the governance committee to refine the current succession plan. This will include development of a transparent process for recruitment of future leaders, and establishing mentorship and leadership training. The BOD is also working to establish a member talent engagement strategy to assist

ISBER leaders in the transition from key leadership roles in ways that will permit continued contribution to the society. As a part of these efforts, the Regional Ambassador (RA) program was introduced this year in Shanghai. The primary role of the RA is to serve as a regional contact working under the direction of the relevant Director-at-Large to better serve a particular area of the region. The RA provides localized advice and feedback on information dissemination, local networking, and educational opportunities, circulation of ISBER materials at local meetings, and effective tools and methodologies to engage communities within their geographical area. They will also assist with identification of local/national meetings and outreach to new biobanks and local organizations.

We will carry on our 20th anniversary celebration with our regional meeting, “Times They Are A Changin’: Biobanks For The Future,” to be held on November 4–5, 2019, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This will be an opportunity to network with colleagues, hear keynote speakers from the North American community of biorepository specialists, and take part in workshops, social events, and fun!

ISBER will continue to maintain and foster global collaboration, create education and training opportunities, and provide an international showcase for state-of-the-art policies, processes, research findings, innovative technologies, products, and services. Together, these activities promote best practices that cut across the broad range of repositories that ISBER serves.

Our many dedicated volunteers who serve the society at every level are to be applauded. The BOD, committee chairs, committee members, working groups, special interest groups, and members ensure that we maintain our standing as the premier integrated global biobanking society. ISBER’s continued growth and development is dependent upon the ongoing engagement of our members.

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