

IUPS and the Future of Physiology

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IUPS and the Future of Physiology

At the closing ceremony of the Congress in Kyoto, Japan, in 2009, the President of IUPS made a clear promise on behalf of the whole of Council:

What on earth does IUPS exist for? We need to give back to you, to the young and upcoming physiologists the conviction that we are creating the environment in which our subject can flourish, and flourish effectively.

What we are going to do with regard to the activities of IUPS is to greatly expand the outreach to the community, not only to our fellow physiologists but also to the general public, and for that reason, we have taken decisions at Council meetings here to see how we can expand our membership. It would be good to target to ensure that at least half of those we have lost in recent years are back in the fold by the time of the next Congress and that at least some of the countries that have never interacted with us come to the next Congress. We are working on ways in which that might be done.

It took the 4 years between Kyoto 2009 and Birmingham 2013 to propose and then implement the changes in IUPS organization required to make fulfillment of this promise possible. We now have a functioning Board of the General Assembly, chaired by Mike Spyer (UK), which represents the member societies of IUPS. That Board is already working on reforms of the dues structure, and it is also greatly helping to ensure a more open and transparent administration. People from around the world can freely access reports and minutes of the Board,

the Executive Committee, and Council on the website www.iups.org. The IUPS office welcomes comments and suggestions, which can be sent to the manager at sxw560@case.edu.

Those who attended the closing ceremony of the Birmingham Congress will also know that we succeeded in expanding the membership to include Nepal, Bangladesh, and Malta, and for the first time ever we welcomed delegates from the People's Republic of North Korea and from Myanmar.

We have now therefore returned to other aspects of the 2009 promise. In this editorial, we will highlight three current outreach initiatives.

The first is to reach out to the regional associations that are members of IUPS to explore ways in which they and IUPS could cooperate, particularly in the organization and sponsorship of meetings, including regional and world congresses. The recent successful Pan-American congress in Brazil showed the way forward in bringing the resources of North and South America together. We are now working with the organizers of the Brazil 2017 IUPS Congress to determine ways in which this model can benefit the world congress. Each IUPS Congress is already, in a real sense, a regional as well as a world meeting, since the great majority of delegates come from the region of the world in which the Congress is held. This approach could also pool resources. Very few national societies can now bear that burden alone. These initiatives require very long lead times since it takes 8 years from the initial successful bid to hosting a congress. We are therefore discussing the extent to which FAOPS can coordinate its efforts to

benefit the 2021 Congress to be held in China.

It is relevant to note that the regional associations are significantly different in their strengths and purposes. In Europe, FEPS operates within a region where there are very strong national societies. Nevertheless, a start was made in the 2013 Congress where the Scandinavians made the Congress become their Annual Meeting, just as the UK and Ireland Society did. This included sponsoring some of the symposia and lectures.

A second initiative is to reach out and help promote physiology in developing countries. Already, IUPS has played a role in helping regional coordination in Africa. Around 200 delegates took part in an open discussion meeting during the 2013 Congress. The result was a very productive exchange of views. Both the Association of African Physiological Societies and the French-speaking Société Africaine des Physiologistes et Pathophysiologistes have held successful regional congresses recently with IUPS sponsorship and participation. We hope that we are seeing the beginning of a rapid growth of our subject in Africa. Those who know what China and India have achieved in recent decades will know that there is no reason in principle why Africa should not also surprise the world in its development of science in the next few decades.

We are therefore exploring ways in which IUPS can help these initiatives, perhaps by being the facilitator to enable the stronger societies in the developed world to exchange and provide assistance. Judging from the success of IUPS in outreach to countries like North Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, and elsewhere, the role of being facilitator seems to work. The reason lies in part in the fact that IUPS is perceived as a neutral international body.

A third initiative is to reach out to other disciplines at the international level, coordinating its efforts through

other BioUnions (members, like the IUPS, of the International Council of Science, or ICSU). Already we have co-sponsored a symposium on obesity with other BioUnions at the 2012 Congress of the International Union of Food Science and Technology (IUFoST) in Brazil. Following the 2013 IUPS Congress, we took the lead with five other unions to sponsor

a satellite meeting on Multi-Scale Systems Biology in Chicheley, UK. And starting in May of 2015, we will co-sponsor an advanced school with the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (IUBMB) and the International Union for Pure and Applied Biophysics (IUPAB). The topic for 2015 will be receptors and signal transduction.

These outreach initiatives are what gives IUPS its role. The answer to the question in our title lies in that perception. IUPS exists to be the medium through which the physiological community worldwide can be represented in a way that is visible internationally and within which all of its members can play a part in advancing our discipline. ■