

African Society of Human Genetics
Annual General Meeting
Held on the 5th November 2007 at the National Research Centre,
Cairo, Egypt

1) President/Chairman's opening comments

The President of the society, Dr. Charles Rotimi, extended a warm welcome to everyone attending the AGM. The Local Organising Committee for the Annual Meeting were thanked for their hard work that enabled the meeting to happen so successfully, and the National Research Centre were thanked for hosting the meeting so professionally.

The African Society of Human Genetics is going from strength to strength and although still very young as a Society we can be proud of our achievements to date – including increasing numbers of members from all around the world, support from the most distinguished scientists in the world and at this year we were privileged to have two NIH Directors (Drs Francis Collins and Griffin Rodgers) as keynote speakers.

However, it is important not to become complacent and we must work towards expanding the membership base. Dr Branwen Hennig was welcomed to the Executive committee as Memberships Secretary. Working closely with Dr Adebowale Adeyemo and other members of the executive, Branwen's task is to develop an electronic membership database and to set up an online payment system for the collection of membership fees.

We also need to develop resources for the community of scientists working in African countries and populations. An important step is to catalogue genetics/genomics activities within the continent to allow better networking and collaboration between groups. Alice Matimba agreed to take on this task and to compile a list of all genetics institutions based in African countries, with details on the key areas of research as well as web addresses and contact details. A major new initiative was also announced "Developing an African genomic project to ensure that tomorrow's medicine and technology will work for all humans". This was to be discussed in a separate session at the 5th Annual Meeting of the AfSHG and a summary of this discussion will be available separately from these minutes. Briefly, the vision here is to develop a resource that will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of human genetics variation within Africa with the goal of understanding human history health and disease in Africa.

Finally, Dr Rotimi announced that Executive Committee elections will be held in 2009.

2) Executive Committee

Two changes were made: Dr Branwen Hennig joins as Membership Secretary and Dr Amboise Wonkam was welcomed as the representative for Central Africa.

3) Next AfSHG meeting

Date

It was proposed that the meeting should be held in Spring 2009. This suggestion takes into account the need for extra time to fund raise for the meeting (it takes over a year to get grant funds once the grant has been written, approved and, most importantly, paid out).

Venue

The cases for holding the meeting in three venues were considered:

- Cape Town (South Africa) presented by Dr Raj Ramesar
- Bamako (Mali) presented by Dr Guida Landoure
- Yaounde (Cameroon) presented by Dr Ambroise Wonkam

All three presenters gave enthusiastic promotion to their home countries, which was followed by open discussion by those attending the meeting.

Consideration needs to be given to:

1. Infrastructure to support the meeting (felt to be sufficient for their own country by all three presenters)
2. Ease of accessing the country (certain countries are expensive or difficult to access by direct flights)
3. The potential impact for the development and promotions of genetics in the hosting country – this would favour holding the meeting in Bamako or Yaounde where there are currently no Societies for Human Genetics
4. Supporting the involvement of Francophone countries

It was pointed out as well that if educational requirements are identified in advance, much support (e.g through Illumina and the Wellcome Trust) could be provided to support the meeting in an environment where genetics (as a discipline) is under-developed.

No final decision regarding the venue was made at the AGM, and further comments were invited by email to the Executive Committee.

It was suggested that if the meetings are to be held every 18 months there should be interim training meetings and workshops – bioinformatics and cytogenetics were identified as possible themes.

4) Membership

Branwen Hennig gave an overview of the proposed electronic database for members and it was agreed the Society should set up online payments as it has not been possible to collect membership fees other than at the Annual Meetings. Bank transfers are costly and collecting money locally would not be feasible.

5) Website and communications

Dr Adebawale Adeyemo made some comments on the website and the listserv emails. This is a useful way to make announcements to members re AfSHG activities, but please do not reply using the mail-group email as your response is sent to the global list.

6) Funds

The Society was in a stronger financial position this year due to the successful bid to NIH for funds to support the meeting in Cairo and the generosity of a number of sponsors listed on the Website. However, the membership base of the society is critical for its survival. Members must remain active and renew their membership every year.

7) Any other business

None