

## Telegraft *From the President's Desk*, June 2020

**Bruce Levine, PhD**  
President, ISCT  
University of Pennsylvania  
United States

*Nothing in Life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.*

-Marie Curie

In my column last issue, I asked, “Are you nostalgic for the past, or are you nostalgic for the future?” The supposition is that as developers and practitioners of advanced cell and gene therapies, we are always looking forward. But as individual members, and as individuals within our respective countries and globally, are we moving forward at what we perceive to be the same speed? Does time move faster or slower for some? Einstein’s theory of special relativity predicts that identical twins may age differently if they move at different speeds relative to each other.

Our diverse backgrounds and circumstances are akin to geographic locations that do impact the speed at which individuals may be able to move forward. A central tenant of our newly adopted ISCT Values Statement is “Respect and Support Diversity and Inclusivity”. Last year, I charged ISCT leadership to propose a Values Statement consistent with our Mission, Vision, and membership needs and interests. At the start of this year, we proposed a Values Statement for submission to the Board of Directors for adoption. To further align our operating culture and experience to these values we have convened a Diversity Working Group.

Inclusivity is already built into the bylaws and values of ISCT – the Diversity Working Group is charged with providing an assessment on how well the Society lives up to its stated values. Our consensus is that more information is required to make informed decisions on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives within ISCT. Therefore, the Diversity Working Group is formulating a survey to gain more information from membership to examine where issues may be addressed through conscious action and clear communication. Please be on the lookout for the survey in the near future. As always, the lines of communication are open to me, to our volunteer leadership, and to the ISCT Head Office.

The ISCT [Mission, Vision, and Values statements are posted more prominently](#) on our new website. In case you missed it, with impressive effort from Head Office and input from our members in mid May ISCT launched our [new and improved website](#). New features include the ability to connect with other members through the ISCT Community tab and a centralized [resource library](#) for past webinars, meeting presentations, committee publications, etc. All ISCT members are automatically part of the all members community and their respective regional community. Optional communities are available for those

interested in lab practices and our early stage professionals. Also check out and participate in the ISCT social media channels on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

Do you have additional suggestions for what you would like to see on the website? [Here](#) is how to provide your feedback.

The new website debuted shortly before our second [Virtual Annual Meeting](#), this year “in” New Orleans. We were live from May 25<sup>th</sup> (pre-conference day) through May 28<sup>th</sup>.

But wait, if you missed any part of the Annual Meeting, know that enduring access will last until December 31, 2021. That is, the 209 Scientific Program Speakers, 95 Industry Expert Speakers, 91 session recordings across the scientific and corporate programs. The theme of the meeting was exemplified in the rich programming on a platform both visually superb and functionally nimble to accommodate live content and real time interactions. The 45 Industry sponsored sessions presented include Live Symposia, Live Roundtables, On-Demand Tutorials, and On-Demand Global Showcases.

The Roundtable format was new to ISCT 2021. The objective of these sessions was to allow organizations to discuss hot topics and pain points impacting the industry from various perspectives. All 52 Virtual Exhibit Booths will remain accessible, and representatives can be emailed. Amongst the six Plenary Sessions, the Presidential Plenary “Integrating Science, Regulatory Oversight, and Commercialization for the New Wave of Cell and Gene Therapies” included luminaries Arie Belldegrun of Kite and Allogene, Peter Marks, Director of the FDA Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, and Matthew Porteus of Stanford. We did something new with the Presidential Plenary and welcomed an Early Stage Professional (ESP), Shabnum Patel to co-chair with me, as one more way to provide visibility and opportunity to our ESPs.

Another new feature at the meeting was [ISCT TV](#), a 30 minute live preview and 30 minute live commentary on each Plenary Session and other highlights from ongoing sessions with a rotating cast of ISCT leaders. I already thought this would be good, but on viewing the first installment I was hooked and a bit jealous that I was not on the initial cast list. It turns out that our Chief Regulatory Officer Karen Nichols was double booked for one time slot, and I got called in as her understudy 😊. This live feature brought a sense of the togetherness one gets at in person meetings, it was fun and casual, with live chat and questions from attendees. You can view all installments on the ISCT YouTube channel [here](#). Your ISCT Virtual New Orleans would not have been possible without our stellar Head Office, Organizing Committee co-chairs Jaap Boelens, Karen Nichols, and George Muschler, and the entire Committee of volunteers to whom we owe our thanks and congratulations for a job exceptionally well done.

You can add to the Meeting Kudoboard [here](#). Next year, we will be back together again, in person in San Francisco May 4-8, 2022. As we look forward to re-connecting in three dimensions and in person, what

would you like to see for future meeting content and format? How do we keep and build on the spirit of #ISCTTogether? Please provide your feedback [here](#).

In the years BP (Before Pandemic), we could say that the only constant in life is change, especially in our field. Over the past 15 months, most of us have been pushed outside our comfort zones. Some of us continue to be in the midst of personal difficulties, making heroic efforts outside of and/or inside our professional responsibilities. Colleagues, friends, and family members have been lost or affected. As vaccines roll out in some parts of the world, other regions are still straining under a continuing caseload of COVID and waiting for vaccine access. I am sure you have shown great compassion to others, be sure to be compassionate with yourselves as well! Compounding the pandemic, many of our members have also been coping with fear upon seeing violence visited upon members of our respective communities and friends' communities. I've said many times that ISCT feels like a family to me, and I hope to you as well. We are a stronger community personally and professionally because of our diversity.

Please read again this quote from Marie Curie, "Nothing in Life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less." Let us all fear less and support one another more in ways that make us better personally, professionally, and as a Society.

-Bruce Levine