

The Teratology Society Newsletter

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January 2009

Letter from the President

Christina Chambers

Happy New Year! Things are off to an exciting start in 2009, with a new administration and restructuring going on all around us. This brings some opportunities for the Society and our members. One important step for the Society, stemming from the Strategic Plan, has been the establishment of an ad hoc Science Committee co-chaired by Elaine Faustman and Tom Knudsen. This multidisciplinary group will tackle several of the diverse needs of the Society, including establishing a science agenda, communication of the Society's mission and the work of teratologists to the public through new channels including a web-based medical encyclopedia, and interface with other major scientific initiatives, such as the National Children's Study. For more about this, see Carole Kimmel's informative article in this issue of the Newsletter. We will look forward to hearing more about the plans and progress of this Committee in the coming months and how Society members can become more involved.

A free-standing Teratology/Embryology Education Course is another exciting work in progress that addresses several of our Strategic Planning goals for

visibility and communication. Kok-Wah Hew chairs an ad hoc committee that is developing this course in collaboration with the Society of Toxicology. This event is planned for 2010 and will meet an important educational need for individuals in a variety of different academic, regulatory, industry, and other settings.

The Society's 50th Anniversary is fast approaching. The Planning Committee for the Anniversary meeting is chaired by John Rogers. I encourage you to contact John with ideas for this celebration and how we can honor our rich history, as well as leverage this into a productive future 50 years.

By now you have undoubtedly perused the 2009 meeting preliminary program, and are excited about the content as well as the venue. Barbara Hales and her Program Committee have worked hard to make this meeting come together and ensure that it is everything you are looking for and more. We look forward to a banner year in abstract submissions, and student attendance. Sponsorship opportunities are still available, and any level of support would be welcomed. Events still available for sponsorship include: the banquet and banquet reception, poster session receptions and the welcoming reception, as well as general meeting sponsorship.

And finally, another friendly reminder about annual renewal of membership. The \$126 membership dues represent a great value in today's market, and are an incredibly important source of revenue that supports the Society's activities. If you have not yet completed this task, please consider doing so using the on-line dues payment option as an easy method. You will find this in the "members only" section of the website. You will also note that this year we

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are offering the opportunity for members to contribute to an expanded number of special funds to help support our awards program. We encourage you to consider making a donation in support of one of these special honors. ■

FASEB Update Spring – Fall '08

John DeSesso

The Teratology Society is a full member of FASEB and participates in activities that relate to the welfare of science/scientists as well as advocating for research funding. FASEB strives to improve respect for scientists and to increase research funding by educating Congress, improving communication among scientists, and sharing the excitement of science with the public. A summary of a few of FASEB's activities over the past few months follows.

Advocacy for NIH Funding: FASEB was the first advocacy group to promote funding for NIH in the FY2008 Supplemental Appropriations Bill, which, when it was ultimately enacted, included increased funding for NIH and NSF. To support our NIH advocacy activities, FASEB launched a new website, the NIH Advocacy Clearinghouse (www.nihadvocacy.org), which consolidates advocacy resources, data, and tools for FASEB society members and others in the research community to use in their own activities.

Educating Candidates and the Electorate: In an historic election, FASEB focused on educating the candidates and voters on the importance of biomedical research and NIH funding, through the election-themed website, www.sciencecures.org. In addition, FASEB submitted platform statements to the Republican and Democratic committees, as well as sponsoring a forum in which representatives from both campaigns discussed science and health policy. Ultimately, FASEB's efforts were rewarded when FASEB President, Richard Marchase, Ph.D., was invited by the Obama transition team to discuss the future of NIH in the next administration.

Biosecurity and Related Activities: FASEB has taken a strong leadership role in biosecurity, particularly in regard to the activities of the National Science Advisory Board on Biosecurity (NSABB), which has been tasked with developing regulations related to dual use life sciences research. The FASEB President, Vice President and staff have been invited to testify a number of times at NSABB meetings and the FASEB position on NSABB's oversight proposal was adopted in a joint statement with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), Association of American Universities (AAU), Council on Governmental Relations (COGR), and National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). On another security issue, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission agreed with and adopted FASEB's recommendation not to prohibit the use of irradiators containing radioactive CsCl, a proposal that would have had severe consequences for many scientists.

Protecting Animal Research: There have been a number of animal research issues occupying the FASEB agenda in the past six months. In response to a continued series of attacks by animal rights extremists against scientists in California, FASEB launched a new website, www.animalrightsextremism.org, which provides resources for researchers and institutions that have come under attack, as well as linking to information about this serious threat to medical research. On the regulatory front, FASEB has been providing testimony to the National Academies' committee charged with updating *The Guide for the Care and use of Laboratory Animals*, as well as meeting regularly with the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC) to discuss issues related to regulatory creep, international harmonization, and other issues of interest.

Additional Activities:

- In response to the increasingly international membership of many member societies, FASEB created an international issues subcommittee of our Science Policy Committee that is tasked with engaging on science policy issues of interest to the international research community.

- FASEB has also recently published the latest edition of our *Breakthroughs in Bioscience* series, an article on neural prosthetics.
- Jennifer Zeitzer has recently accepted the position of Legislative Director. Jennifer was previously with the Alzheimer's Association, where she served as Director of Congressional Relations. She will be responsible for directing FASEB's legislative agenda, serving as the organization's principal representative on Capitol Hill. ■

Annual Meeting Deadlines

On-line Abstract Submission	Feb. 18
Early Bird Registration	Feb. 18
Student Travel Awards	Feb. 18
Advance Registration	May 15
Hotel Reservation	May 15
Pre-Registration	June 23

Birth Defects Prevention Month

Summarized from MMWR 57(53):1409, 2009

January is National Birth Defects Prevention Month. Approximately 1 in 33 newborns is affected by a birth defect. Such defects are a leading cause of infant mortality, and lifetime care for all infants born in a single year with one or more severe birth defects has been estimated at \$6 billion. The focus this year is on maternal obesity which has been associated with various birth defects, especially neural tube defects (NTD).

January 5-11 is National Folic Acid Awareness Week. Consuming 400 µg of folic acid daily, before and during early pregnancy, can help reduce the risk for an NTD-affected pregnancy. Health-care professionals should encourage women of childbearing age to consume folic acid daily through a vitamin supplement or enriched foods.

Racial/Ethnic Differences in the Birth Prevalence of Spina Bifida – United States, 1995-2005

Summarized from MMRW 57(53):1409, 2009

The Food and Drug Administration mandated the fortification of enriched cereal grains with folic acid beginning in January of 1998. When the incidence of NTDs was analyzed from October of 1998 through December of 1999, the prevalence of spina bifida in the U.S. had decreased 22.9% when compared to the prevalence in 1995-1996. However, when analyzed in 2003-2004, no further decreases had been observed; at that time the prevalence was higher among Hispanic women than among women in other ethnic groups. The CDC recently reviewed birth certificates from 46 states and the District of Columbia. The ten year time period of 1995 – 2005 was broken down into 4 periods. Prefortification (1995-1996), early postfortification (1999-2000), mid-postfortification (2001-2002) and recent postfortification (2003-2005). The early postfortification period was used as the referent period for all analyses.

An average of 767 cases of spina bifida were reported each year of the period among all ethnic groups. The prevalence of spina bifida among non-Hispanic white women was 2.00 per 10,000 live births, 1.96 among Hispanic women, and 1.74 among non-Hispanic black women.

When comparing the prefortification period with the most recent postfortification period, the prevalence of spina bifida decreased 6.9% among all ethnic groups from 2.04 to 1.90 per 10,000 live births. The prevalence decreased among non-Hispanic black women from 2.17 to 1.74 cases per 10,000 live births, with no significant decreases among non-Hispanic white women or Hispanic women when the same 2 time periods were compared. These results contrast with earlier reports that did not demonstrate a similar prevalence among non-Hispanic white women and Hispanic women.

National Children's Study Update – January 2009

Carole Kimmel

Background

The National Children's Study is the largest long-term study of environmental exposures and genetic effects on children's health ever conducted in the United States. By following 100,000 children from before birth to age 21, Study researchers hope to better understand how children's genes and their environments interact to affect their health and development. In the study, "environment" includes factors such as contaminants in air, water, and house dust, what children eat, how they are cared for, the safety of their neighborhoods, how often they see a doctor, and other factors. Much more information about planning for and initiation of the Study can be found on the NCS website (www.nationalchildrensstudy.gov).

The National Children's Study is led by a consortium of federal partners including: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (which includes the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Members of the National Children's Study Federal Advisory Committee—including its working groups of more than 2,400 obstetric, pediatric, and environmental health researchers from federal agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations—completed the planning and groundwork that helped the lead federal agencies design and develop the Study.

The Study will examine important health issues, including: birth defects and pregnancy-related problems; injuries; asthma; obesity; diabetes; and behavior, learning, and mental health disorders to establish links between children's environments and their health. By tracking children's development through infancy, childhood, and early adulthood, the Study hopes to determine the root causes of many childhood and adult diseases.

The Study will be conducted in [105 locations](#) (counties or in rural areas, groups of counties) across the United States (see attached map). All locations were selected using a probability-based method to ensure that children and families across the nation—from diverse ethnic, racial, economic, religious, geographic, and social groups—are fairly represented in the Study. Study Centers are organizations such as universities or hospitals, often working in collaboration, that are engaged through a federal contract to conduct the study at these various locations. The Study Centers will work within their assigned Study locations to recruit participants and collect and process data, and some

will conduct the Study in more than one Study location.

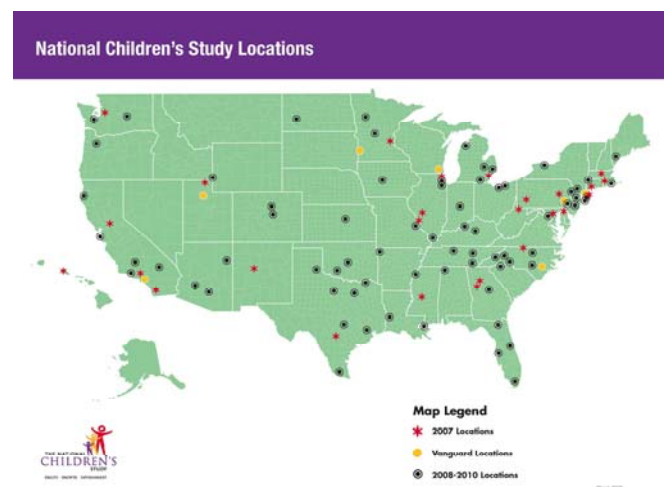
Funding Update

Funding for the early years of development and implementation of the study (2000-2006) was through the lead supporting agencies: the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Institutes of Health and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. NIH received Congressional funding of \$69 million in FY 2007 to support the National Children's Study for funding Study Centers in several locations across the country and for recruiting women into the Study in the 7 Vanguard Centers that will serve as the pilot for the Study. Full funding for the National Children's Study in FY 2008 was appropriated by Congress in the amount of \$110.9 million. Funding for other NIH research activities was not affected. To continue the study, funding in the amount of \$192.3 million is needed for FY 2009. Funding for the study continues to have to be pursued year by year since it has not been included in the President's budget.

Current Status

Thirty-six Study Centers are currently operational and are at various stages of preparation for participant recruitment. The seven Vanguard Centers will be the first to begin recruitment efforts in 2009, followed by the remaining Study Centers over the next few years. These Centers will manage Study operations in more than 70 of the 105 previously designated Study locations. Future Study Centers will manage the remaining locations.

A Coordinating Center oversees training, data collection, analysis, and quality control for the Study. Laboratory and repository contracts for sample analysis and storage will be pursued in 2009. ■



Candidates for Council

The following individuals have agreed to have their name placed in nomination for an office on the Teratology Society Council. Biographical information and the vision statements of the candidates for Vice President-Elect will be sent to Society members in Feb.

Vice President-Elect



John M. Graham, Jr., M.D., Sc.D.



Mark E. Hurtt, Ph.D.

Secretary



Kok-Wah Hew, Ph.D., DABT



Mary Alice Smith, Ph.D.

Councilor



Susan Makris, M.S.



Sonja A. Rasmussen, M.D.