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Editor
ROBERT O. SCOW
Laboratory of Nutrition and Endocrinology,
National Institute of Arthritis,
Metabolism and Digestive Diseases,
National Institutes of Health,
Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.

Co-editors
F. J. G. EBLING and I. W. HENDERSON
Department of Zoology,
University of Sheffield, Sheffield, U.K.

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Goals of the International Congress of Endocrinology

The International Congress of Endocrinology is held every 4 years under the auspices of the International Society of Endocrinology for the purpose of disseminating information concerning hormones. The specific goals of the Congress are:

1. To present an overall view of endocrinology,
2. To draw attention to new developments and to indicate where progress may be expected in the near future,
3. To arrange special lectures reviewing the advances made in specific areas,
4. To stimulate research in other areas by conducting symposia and workshops where experts present and discuss their current findings,
5. To give young endocrinologists an opportunity to report their research in short communications,
6. To afford occasions for endocrinologists of different countries to become acquainted and to discuss with each other topics of mutual interest, and
7. To represent and to observe the international status of endocrinology.

Some of the ways and means used by the IV Congress to achieve these goals are described below.

The Program Committee

The President, Secretary General, and Executive Committee of the International Society of Endocrinology elected a Chairman for the Program Committee in September 1970 at Hamburg, and then selected the Committee members. The Committee, comprising 16 persons from 10 countries, met for the first time January 1971 at Bethesda, Maryland, where it received very helpful advice from both the Local Organizing Committee and the International Society of Endocrinology. The second meeting was held June 1971 at Santa Barbara, California, where a vigorous and energetic but not always unanimous atmosphere prevailed.

Selection of topics

The next step in the creation of the program was the selection of topics for lectures and symposia which would interest and attract the largest variety of participants. It is evident that special international congresses, such as those on diabetes, thyroid, fertility and reproduction, and steroids, will furnish more extensive information on particular aspects of endocrinology. However, it is essential that endocrinologists from all areas be brought together.

Of the rapidly developing fields that received attention, I should especially like to mention neuroendocrinology and the releasing hormones, which were still hypothetical at the London Congress in 1964. In general, interactions between hormones and the central nervous system have enjoyed world-wide attention, and the progress made during the past 10 years is one of the most impressive in the history of endocrinology. The substances with hormone-like actions, such as prostaglandins, renin-angiotensin, and gastrointestinal hormones, had to be considered, as well as endocrine regulation of bone metabolism and hormonal aspects of conception. In recent years, biochemistry and molecular biology have had an ever-increasing impact on endocrinology, with the consequence that remarkable progress has been made in understanding how steroid and other hormones act at the molecular level. Of course, enthusiasm for these fascinating developments could not blur the sight for the practical aspects of endocrinology which are of equal importance to many who attend the Congress.

Selection of speakers

Once the topics were chosen, speakers had to be selected to bring the plan to life. In this connection we had to face the problem of maintaining the international character of the Congress while acknowledging the fact that the United States of America holds a prominent position in endocrinology. Furthermore, the participation of speakers from some countries was in question, at least for some time, for economical reasons. As might be expected, not all of those invited were able to accept and declines came mostly from those for whom alternates had not been considered. But finally the roster was completed, and the chairmen could be invited.

Whether the policy of the International Society of Endocrinology to invite chairmen after the selection of topics and speakers is preferable to having chairmen participate in program planning is certainly debatable. From the comments received it was evident that the ideas of some chairmen differed substantially from those of the Program Committee with respect to both topics and speakers. Nonetheless, most of the invitations were accepted.

Selection of short communications

Since strong criticism was voiced by authors whose short communications were not included on the program, I should like to mention how communications were selected. Unfortunately, the format of the Congress allowed acceptance of only 50% of those submitted. Each abstract was read and scored independently by four experts and the mean value of the scores was used to select short communications for the program. Although certain areas were overcrowded, they could not be expanded because a balance in the program had to be maintained. Consequently, short communications in certain areas were rejected which had scores high enough to be acceptable in less crowded areas.

Too little of too much?

A very energetic participant, attending meetings from Monday morning through Friday evening, could have heard only one-fourth of the papers presented. Of the 32 hours planned for presentation of scientific papers, 5 (15%) were devoted to the 5 plenary lectures and the rest (85%) to 223 symposia lectures and 641 short communications presented in 12 simultaneous sessions. Thus, he could have attended all of the plenary lectures, but only 8.3% of the other sessions. However, he had the option to improve his attendance score by spending 8 hours on Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning in workshops and special technique sessions. More than 90% of the symposia lectures and 3 of the plenary lectures are presented in the Proceedings for those who were unable to attend the sessions of their choice.

Some errors and omissions

One of the major complaints concerning the program was the inadequate attention given to clinical endocrinology. Representatives from various countries said they would have appreciated special sessions on clinical endocrinology. Although the emphasis placed on biochemical and molecular aspects of endocrinology may have decreased the time allotted to clinical endocrinology, endocrinologists with a mainly clinical interest may admit that quite a few symposia and free communication sessions included topics of clinical significance.

Another problem was the poor attendance at the symposia on comparative endocrinology. Afterwards, it was suggested that papers on hormones in invertebrates and nonmammalian vertebrates be included in sessions with other topics. Since very useful information can be obtained from comparative endocrinology, it would be a pity to see a dwindling attendance of comparative endocrinologists at future Congresses. Therefore, an effort should be made to incorporate them more effectively into the program.

Problems beyond control of the Program Committee

On the first day of the Congress, June 19, the International Association of Pilots called a 24-hour strike to protest insufficient safety measures against air piracy. Fortunately, all speakers for the first two days had arrived and there were no dropouts.

Then came Agnes, the hurricane that hit the eastern States from Florida to New York. Agnes obviously had interest in endocrinology since she stayed through the rest of the Congress. Agnes brought one of the worst floods to the Washington area, with heavy rains falling Wednesday evening when Congress members from abroad were dinner guests in the homes of local endocrinologists. For some of the guests, hospitality was extended to the next morning because of the floods, demonstrating again the generosity of our hosts.

Concluding thoughts

The Proceedings of the Congress should not only remind members of the sessions they attended but also inform them of those they missed. Readers who were unable to come to Washington will also profit from the plenary and symposia lectures summarizing the current knowledge of endocrinology. Although a book can never fully substitute for the atmosphere of a congress, it has the advantage that the printed word outlasts ephemeral speech and permits a careful study of the material presented. I hope that readers of this volume will also feel some of the excitement and fascination that all of us experienced as we prepared the program for the IV International Congress.

Franz Gross, M.D.
Heidelberg

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Plenary Lectures

HYPOTHALAMIC-PITUITARY FUNCTION*, **

SEYMOUR REICHLIN

Departments of Physiology and of Medicine,
University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Farmington, Conn., U.S.A.

In deciding upon the topics to be covered in plenary sessions, the Program Committee of the International Endocrine Society chose areas in which there was intense interest by a broad spectrum of endocrinologists and in which progress was being made with particular rapidity. Few topics more closely suit this description than that of hypothalamic-pituitary interrelationships. It is the purpose of this lecture to outline the scope of clinical neuroendocrinology, to summarize current ideas about the mechanism of hypothalamic control of the anterior pituitary gland and to describe work in biosynthesis of the hypothalamic hormones recently completed by my associates and myself. It is appropriate first to pay tribute to Geoffry Harris and Solomon Berson, both of whom died untimely this year. To Harris must go the credit for having recognized the full significance of the hypophysial-portal circulation as the conduit of neurohumoral control of the anterior pituitary and for having laid the major anatomic-physiological basis for current concepts of the portal-vessel chemotransmitter hypothesis. Berson and his associates made signal advances in the study of pituitary function through immunoassay which enabled investigators to study hypothalamic functions more precisely in animals and to extend this work to the human being. A third major contributor to this field, Ernst Scharrer, who died only a few years ago, pioneered with his collaborators the concept of neurosecretion which recognizes that certain nerve cells are capable of secreting endocrine products and so may serve as the link between the brain and the endocrine system, to form what Wurtman (1970, *a*, *b*) has termed the neuroendocrine transducer.

As one surveys the state of the field today (if the program of this society is any indication), it is obvious that there is an intense amount of interest in neuroendocrinology. Two advances have combined to bring this situation about. The first is the overwhelming physiological evidence (now bolstered by specific studies using radioimmunoassays in man), that the anterior pituitary is controlled by the brain to a degree that previously was only guessed at by even the most enthusiastic exponents of experimental neuroendocrinology. The second advance is the discovery of the chemical nature of at

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* Studies referred to were supported by U.S.P.H.S. Grant 13695.

** Eli Lilly Lecture of the Endocrine Society for 1972.