Perspective: the ISS boldly goes

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Since its foundation in 1972, the International Skeletal Society (ISS) has been at the forefront of education into musculoskeletal disorders with its own journal, *Skeletal Radiology*, and the running of a three-and-a-half-day refresher course for members and non-members alike. Planning for the 38th Annual ISS Imaging Update Course in San Diego in the fall of 2011 is well underway and members look forward with eager anticipation to the announcement of future venue cities with the same enthusiasm as potential Olympic Games hosts. These refresher courses undoubtedly deliver concentrated and high-quality teaching to an appreciative audience. However, like their Olympic counterparts, they are expensive events to organize and require large hotel/conference facilities. Not surprisingly, they tend to be held in major cities in developed countries with good worldwide air connections for the 20% of the world's population who account over 75% of the spending on imaging and imaging-related products. What about the two-thirds of the world's population that have little access to the most basic diagnostic imaging more than 100 years after the discovery of X rays? Regrettably, large international organizations such as the World Health Organization seem to be more interested in maintaining the bureaucratic status quo rather than addressing the issues [1]. Unfortunately, there is little that a small society such as the ISS can do for many parts of the Developing World. There is, however, an increasing group of physicians across the globe who for a variety of

geographic, political, and financial reasons are unable to attend major international meetings such as refresher courses but would still benefit from receiving high-quality teaching. So, as the old proverb states, "If the mountain will not come (*or more accurately cannot come*) to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain". With this in mind, former ISS President, Professor Iain McCall, set up in 2003 the ISS Outreach Program. Unashamedly modeled on similar European and American initiatives, such as the RSNA International Visiting Professor Program, the aim is to send a faculty of three ISS members to deliver an intensive 2-day course on the diagnosis of musculoskeletal disorders to developing countries.

In the 7 years up to and including 2009, a total of 14 Outreach Programs had been organized from as far apart as Siberia and Argentina to India and Latvia (Fig. 1). In recognition of the universal enthusiasm with which the programs have been received by the participants, the ISS Executive Committee decided to extend the exercise. A revamped committee was formed with regional coordinators appointed, where possible ISS members with cultural or ethnic links to that particular region. The program has been expanded to six Outreach Programs a year (Fig. 1). By the end of 2011, 65 ISS members will have participated as a faculty member on one or more of the 27 programs. An occasional series of perspective articles will be published in this journal reviewing the state of MSK imaging in different countries or world regions. The first in this series will highlight the situation in Western Africa [2]. So far the programs have been predominantly radiology-based, but it is envisaged that a more multidisciplinary approach may be introduced in due course.

There are numerous challenges in organizing a successful Outreach Program. Not least, how do you measure success? Flying in a dedicated faculty to teach an equally

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motivated group of local physicians undoubtedly scores well on all participant surveys but as is well recognized, proving a beneficial impact of CME activities can be difficult [3]. Until such time as a robust system for measuring benefit is introduced, the ISS will continue this altruistic venture in the firm belief that it will provide a lasting legacy. To borrow a phrase from an iconic American TV show, our lecturers will continue to *boldly go*

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