Report from the GRG President

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As the not so newly elected President of the Gastroenterology Research Group (GRG), I would like to take this opportunity to update the readership of *Digestive Diseases and Sciences* (DDS), including members of the GRG, on recent events. For the past year, the GRG Steering Committee and I have been focusing on exciting new changes in the administration and operations of the GRG Symposium, the GRG Young Investigator Awards, and the GRG Travel Awards. In fact, by now, members of the GRG have likely received a letter from me outlining these new administration and operational changes and have voted to accept the resolution presented to the membership. For those of you who have not seen my earlier letter, let me update you on what has taken place recently.

As you know, the GRG was established in 1955 by Drs. Basil I. Hirschowitz, E.C. Texter, and Joseph B. Kirsner with the goal of “providing a forum where ideas could be freely exchanged and new research stimulated”. The formation of the GRG was a response to AGA President Dwight Wilber’s 1954 Presidential address that highlighted the need to encourage more research in digestive diseases. Thus, from its inception, the goals of the GRG have been closely intertwined with those of the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA). To date, the GRG Symposium continues to provide such a scientific forum for discussion and the generation of new research ideas during Digestive Disease Week. Moreover, the central mission of today’s GRG is to foster, support,

and promote young investigators (physicians-scientists and doctoral scientists). This is exemplified by the numerous GRG-sponsored activities including the Young Investigator Awards (Basic and Clinical Science), GRG Travel Awards, and the Methodologies in Health Outcomes in Gastroenterology course. Young investigators, one of our most important resources, represent the future of research in gastroenterology and hepatology.

Unfortunately, the past few years have seen a steady decline in the operating budget of the GRG. One element of this decrease in budget is a decline in membership dues that does not appear to be due to waning interest in the GRG, since a large number of AGA investigators take pride in identifying themselves as GRG members, but rather due to increasing financial constraints on discretionary funds available to investigators. Furthermore, a substantial decline in industry support has also eliminated a source of revenue for the GRG operating budget. Thus, the operating budget of the GRG has steadily declined due to a lack of revenue and the increased expenses associated with maintaining the organization’s dues-based membership. In order for the GRG to maintain solvency so that it can promote its missions and goals, the AGA has accepted a proposal from the GRG to take over the administrative functions of the organization, which necessitated our restructuring.

As part of this restructuring, the GRG *will* retain our name, our brand, our relationship with DDS, and our continued existence as an organization, but without a dues-based membership. The Steering Committee will continue to organize (topic and speaker selection) the GRG Spring Symposium, and the organization will continue to provide financial support for the GRG Spring Symposium. We will continue to select and support the Young Investigator Awards and the Fellow Travel Awards. Through the

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generous gift of Rifat Pamukcu, M.D, we will continue to offer the GRG Travel Awards. The journal *Digestive Diseases and Sciences* will continue to be recognized as the “Official Journal of the GRG”. Dr. Emmet B. Keeffe, Editor-in-Chief, and Springer are fully committed to maintaining this relationship. Since the GRG will no longer have membership dues, the print copy of DDS will no longer be available to GRG members at reduced cost. Individuals interested in the GRG will be able to find out about the organization via our website (<http://www.gastroresearch.org/>) and will be able to identify themselves as being interested in “membership” simply by emailing the organization. Our membership list will then be used by the GRG Steering Committee for the purposes of identifying new members of the GRG Steering Committee and, with the input of the Editor-in Chief of DDS, new associate editors and members of the journal’s editorial board.

In order to ensure the continued existence of the GRG Symposium, the GRG Young Investigator Awards, and the GRG Travel Awards, the GRG will need to continue our fund-raising efforts with the goal of establishing an endowment such that, in the future, the GRG Symposium and GRG awards will be supported by the investment income earned on the endowment. The GRG Founders Fund in honor of Drs. Kirsner, Hirschowitz and Texter was a huge success this spring with contributions exceeding \$10,000 in only 3 months! Much thanks to all of you who contributed. Moving forward, the GRG Steering Committee and I plan to continue such fund-raising efforts from both private individuals and corporate sponsors to establish an endowment in the names of Drs. Kirsner, Hirschowitz and Texter to ensure that our GRG Symposium and awards continue.

Upcoming Events

Please check the GRG website (<http://www.gastroresearch.org/>) for information and deadlines for the 2011 Young

Investigator Awards and Travel Awards. The GRG Steering Committee will be accepting nominations for Steering Committee members and for the position of President-Elect. Application information, position responsibilities, and deadlines for nominations will be sent by email and available on the GRG website. The GRG Symposium entitled “MicroRNAs as Pleiotropic Regulators in Digestive and Liver Disease” will be held Monday, May 9th from 8:00 to 10:30 am in Room 352 on the third level of the Lakeside Building. Our outstanding panel of expert speakers include Dr. Joe Nadeau, Professor and Chair of Genetics at Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine, Dr. Holger Willenbring, Assistant Professor in the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research, University of California, San Francisco, and Dr. Didier Merlin, Associate Professor of Medicine at Emory University.

Final Words

On a personal note, I truly believe restructuring is vital to the continued existence of GRG. Such a move will allow the organization to return to its roots and concentrate on promoting the exchange of cutting-edge scientific information, enhancing the flow of scientific communications, and fostering partnerships between basic and clinical investigators, while cultivating, supporting, and promoting young investigators engaged in research in gastrointestinal and liver disease. I would also like to continue to encourage members of the GRG to submit original clinical and basic science manuscripts to DDS. In addition, I would like to encourage the continuation of productive interactions between the GRG’s senior mentors and young investigators by encouraging submission of up-to-date translational research reviews to DDS. It has been quite a year for me as President of the GRG. Without a doubt, I look forward to another exciting year for the GRG.