

Gender Equality and Career Development (GECD) Committee Report

29 May, 2012

Lima, Peru

Submitted by Olivera J. Finn, GECD Chair and Narinder Mehra, Co-Chair

GECD is the newest IUIS Committee established at the 2010 IUIS Council meeting in Kobe, Japan. The mission of the Committee is to encourage promotion of women immunologists around the world and to help with career development issues of women and young scientists. We monitor various activities around the world of organizations devoted to these topics and publicize those that are important to our mission. The Committee encourages and offers assistance to IUIS member societies to undertake activities that promote gender equality. The Committee compiles and maintains current a list of outstanding women immunologists around the world, both young and established scientists, to aid organizers of important international meetings in selecting women speakers and assuring their proper representation. The Committee supports attendance of women trainees at various courses, in collaboration with other IUIS Committees, in particular the Education Committee. The Committee organizes various educational and networking activities for women and trainees in association with IUIS member societies and Federations during their meetings and congresses.

Committee Members

Olivera J. Finn, Committee Chair
Narinder Mehra, Committee Co-Chair
Franca Ronchese, Member
Anna Erdel, Member
Jeffrey Frelinger, Member
Rudolf Valenta, Member
Xuetao Cao, Member

Committee Activities 2010/2011

Sponsorship of Attendance at Courses Important to Career Development:

This activity is carried out in collaboration with the Education Committee. Dr. Michelle Letarte, Chair, and members of the Education Committee, which includes Dr. Finn and Dr. Mehra, select the most qualified applicants to attend the course and then one of them, usually a deserving woman on the verge of taking a leadership role in her group or institution, is selected to be sponsored by GECD. In February 2011, GECD sponsored the attendance of Dr. Deepika Kanojia, from the Institute of Immunology, India, at an advanced FOCIS immunology course. Dr. Kanojia was beginning to take on increasing supervisory and leadership responsibilities in the group of Dr. Anil Suri where she trained as a PhD student. The course provided her with an opportunity to make contacts with her peers around the world and the faculty with whom she can continue to keep in contact for further career mentoring

opportunity. Dr. Kanojia submitted a detailed report after returning from the course that can be found on the GECD Committee website. In February 2012, GECD co-sponsored Dr. Ghada Boghdadi, Assistant Professor at Zagazig University in Egypt. Dr. Boghdadi's report can also be found on the GECD website.

We have already selected a candidate, Caroline Ogwang from Kenya, that GECD Committee will sponsor to attend the AAI course in June 2012.

Career Development Networking Events and Symposia:

It is a goal of the GECD Committee to organize these events at all the IUIS Federations meetings, at ICI and at other international gatherings that include a large number of trainees and/or take place in countries that have not traditionally supported career development of women.

Networking Breakfast at AICI, the first such event, was organized in November 2011 during the 2nd EFIS-EJI African International Conference on Immunity in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. Dr. Finn participated in the conference as a speaker and also organized the Networking Breakfast that was attended by over 40 participants, both young and established women scientists from Europe, US and all over Africa. There was an informal exchange of personal experiences and useful advice on what it takes under many different social and geographic circumstances to have a fulfilling professional and personal life. The most useful part of this meeting, as indicated by the participants, was that junior women scientists currently struggling with these issues got to meet their senior colleagues who have successfully handled them. In other words, they could see that this was possible. In addition, women were made aware of several ongoing IUIS activities, especially of the IUIS Education Committee, which they were advised to follow closely on the IUIS website for career development opportunities.

Because GECD is a new IUIS committee and still developing its plan of action, the participants were asked for suggestions on what the committee could do at least in short term to assist them in their efforts. The suggestions were: 1) to develop the GECD web site into a resource page with direct links to international organizations that aid women in their professional development; 2) to create a list of established women scientists who would be willing mentors for junior women; 3) to maintain as much as possible person-to-person contacts that get established during organized meetings such as this one; 4) to organize these gatherings as often as possible. GECD is working on all these suggestions.

Many participants had for the first time heard of IUIS or the GECD Committee and becoming aware of that as a source of information was considered very important by the breakfast participants. A long report about this event and pictures can be found on the GECD website.

Gender Equality Symposium at FIMSA was organized in March of 2012 during the 5th FIMSA Congress in New Delhi. The Symposium was organized by Drs. Finn and Mehra and included speakers who were invited because of their important roles in

science administration in India. Discussion was then led by those speakers with the help of several additional panelists, women immunologists who hold important leadership positions around the world.

The Symposium was very well attended by close to 100 participants, women and men, and the discussion was very spirited. A number of Indian women immunologists questioned why the policies that have been put into place to facilitate women's participation in the scientific enterprise are not giving better results. A number of international participants shared the results of their own policies and offered suggestions how things can be better organized. Again, one of the best outcomes of the Symposium was that women connected with each other to continue informal discussions and connections. The report on the symposium and an article written on the topic of gender equality in Indian science can be found on the GECD website.

The third networking event is taking place at this ALAI congress under the supervision of Dr. Mehra, GECD Committee Co-Chair. The next even is being planned for the FAIS Congress in December 2012 in South Africa.

Promotion of Women Immunologists:

One of the GECD Committee's goals is to assure that women immunologists are well represented at international immunology meetings. We are at the moment working with presidents of all IUIS societies to populate the ICI 2013 program with names of accomplished women immunologists who can serve as session chairs and/or give talks in various plenary session, symposia and other venues at the congress. The draft program has been sent to all societies and many have already returned it with specific names that will be forwarded to the Scientific Organizing Committee of ICI.