Message from the WGO President

Fifty Years of World Gastroenterology
The World Gastroenterology Organisation 1958-2008

In this year, 2008, the World Gastroenterology Organization (WGO) marks its silver jubilee, an occasion that gives us all an opportunity to consider the development and current status of this organization and, indeed, of global gastroenterology. WGO/OMGE is an organization of organizations; its members are the national societies of gastroenterology and its activities are developed and enacted in collaboration with them. The past 50 years have witnessed a tremendous growth in the number of national gastroenterology societies; WGO now includes 104 societies within its fold! The Indian Society of Gastroenterology, which will itself soon celebrate its golden jubilee, is a long-standing and much valued member.

Who, 50 years ago, could have envisaged the developments that have thoroughly revolutionized gastroenterology over this half century? Endoscopy, an investigational tool that is now indispensable to gastroenterology practice, has emerged from a largely forgotten era of rigid or semi-flexible instruments to a time when fully flexible video-endoscopes and capsule endoscopy have become the norm and the ability to access any part of the digestive tract expected. Meanwhile, the advent of the molecular era has provided the gastroenterologist with a completely new approach to diagnosis and therapy. Fifty years ago the idea that peptic ulcer disease, gastric cancer and gastric lymphoma might have an infectious cause would have been laughed at; now the discovery of Helicobacter pylori and its role in these disorders wins a Nobel Prize. Advances in immunosuppression, surgery and intensive care allow patients with end-stage liver disease to receive transplants and to expect to enjoy, not only long-term survival, but also an excellent quality of life. Progress with that most challenging of organ transplantation procedures, small intestinal transplantation, continues.

These and other advances may ultimately re-define the boundaries of this specialty; others may diminish or augment the primacy of certain areas within it. Major demographic trends, such as the aging of our populations and the growing obesity epidemic, will also impact significantly on the workload and work practices of the gastroenterologist of the future. Accordingly, he or she must have a sound grounding in medical science as well as internal medicine and be equipped to cope with and embrace those changes that will inevitably come. Herein lies one of the major challenges that face gastroenterology today: ensuring that our future practitioners are appropriately trained to cope with a complex and ever-changing medical environment, yet one that must retain the patient and his or her illness at the center of our universe.

It must be stressed that these advances have not been evenly bestowed on the world’s population. Some areas of our planet have barely felt the impact of advances in diagnostics and therapeutics and still struggle with the ravages of malnutrition and infectious disease; many of their children simply do not live long enough to develop the chronic diseases that so preoccupy the West. Even as these countries develop, they face a further impending disaster: as their health professionals leave their home countries in droves to seek better lives elsewhere, they starve their nation’s health service of the knowledge and skills that they so desperately need. Vast areas of the world are devoid of gastroenterologists while many other areas do not have the wherewithal to train specialists in the care of digestive disease.

The current objectives of WGO are enshrined in its mission statement: to promote, to the general public and health care professionals alike, an awareness of the worldwide prevalence and optimal care of digestive disorders through the provision of high - quality, accessible and independent education and training. This signals the commitment of WGO to, firstly, provide the gastroenterologist of the future with an optimal training and, secondly, bring the benefits of digestive health - care to those who currently struggle or, indeed, fail to achieve access to it. These objectives are achieved through distinctive, though closely inter-related, programs: Train-the-Trainers, Training Centers, Global Guidelines and the International Digestive Cancer Alliance (IDCA).

Train-the-Trainers is uniquely devoted to bringing the very latest in educational techniques to those who will train the gastroenterologists of the future. Our Training Centres represent a direct collaboration between local experts, international faculty and several national and regional societies from Europe and North America to deliver regionally relevant training to those who have limited, or in some cases, no access to such opportunities.

Our global guidelines are evidence-based, prepared by international panels of experts, and are unique in, firstly, addressing issues that afflict emerging nations, secondly, being available on our website.
IDCA seeks to promote information and education and research in digestive cancers, collectively the most common cancers worldwide, through educational programs, media events and support for local or national awareness campaigns and, especially, those devoted to the early detection of digestive cancer.

WGO has an ambition to develop a global network of high-quality gastroenterology education and training based on an interlinked system of Training Centers. Our challenge is to make the case for long-term benefits to all of the success of this mission: to patients, society and all who seek to develop gastroenterology as a field of medical practice, therapeutic progress and device innovation.

This is a time of great challenge and opportunity in our specialty; the role of your world body, the World Gastroenterology Organization, has never been more relevant and vital.

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President, World Gastroenterology Organisation

References


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Indian Journal of Gastroenterology

J Mitra Memorial Award

The Indian Journal of Gastroenterology bestows this award for the best original scientific contribution published in the Journal during the year.

This award carries a prize of Rs 20 000, and will be given to the department(s) submitting the selected paper. The paper will be selected by a scientific committee appointed by the Editor, from among all the Original Articles published in the Journal during the year. In the event of a tie, the award will be distributed equally. Terms for eligibility will apply.

The award has been made possible by a generous endowment from M/s J Mitra and Co Ltd, New Delhi.