

## Guest Perspective – Dr. Robert L. Brent



*HESI News sponsors a series of "Guest Perspectives" in each edition as a means of introducing some of the individuals who devote so much of their time, energy, and talent to the goals and objectives of HESI. We thank Dr. Robert L. Brent, Distinguished Professor of Pediatrics, Radiology and Pathology, Thomas Jefferson University, A.I. duPont Hospital for Children, for taking the time to introduce us to his background and interests, and share some of his impressions of HESI.*

I first met Alex Malaspina in 1984 when he and Dr. Jack Filer came to Philadelphia to discuss the possible creation of a new organization that would be part of ILSI. Earlier, we had spoken on the telephone at length about this new organization. I was looking forward to our meeting because of the expected focus of the new organization on the reproductive and developmental risks caused by environmental exposures. I knew Jack Filer very well. He was a pediatrician who graduated from the University of Rochester Medical School (my alma mater as well). His research, teaching, and administrative activities were in the field of nutrition. Jack had recommended me to Alex. We met on two other occasions at the Stein Research Center, the developmental and radiation biology institute that I directed. After these meetings, we agreed that the new organization would be devoted to the entire field of environmental toxicology, and Alex named the new organization the Health and Environmental Science Institute. The structure of ILSI was used as the framework for HESI which meant that the Board of Trustees would be tripartite, with corporate representatives, academic representatives, and some governmental representation. This was probably the most important aspect of HESI, because it provided the checks and balances that markedly reduced the

allegation directed toward similar organizations that primarily represented the best interests of industry. A lengthy conflict of interest document evolved that was distributed at every meeting and was frequently flashed on the screen before each scientific session. Each board member knew that there were certain activities and interactions (for example, political activity or lobbying) that were inappropriate for Board members of a not-for-profit organization.

At the first meeting of HESI, I met all the members of the Board. I was impressed. The quality and accomplishments of the scientists that represented industry and academia were outstanding. The annual scientific meetings were worth attending because they were in the forefront of scientific advances. I personally did not miss a single scientific session, and I certainly did not miss the opening reception and in the early days, the final sit down banquet.

As HESI matured, so did the administrative structure of the organization. The usual organizational committees were in place from the start: 1) Bylaws and Rules Committee, 2) Scientific Program Committee, 3) Nominating Committee for selecting officer candidates and board members, 4) meeting site selection, and 5) Finance Committee. As the organization matured, the goals

were refined and new committees were formed to attain the goals that crystalized in the minds of the officers and members:

6) Membership Development Committee, 7) Program Strategy and Stewardship Committee, 8) technical project committees, and 9) Emerging Issues Steering Committee.

These latter three committees were important in that they encouraged the submission of new projects that were periodically re-evaluated as to whether they were accomplishing their goals and whether their work was complete. Peer review was an essential feature for all publications, both in-house and by outside reviewers. New board members may be under the impression that the present structure of HESI was in place from the beginning of the organization. That impression could not be further from the truth.

One of the most important events in HESI's history was the selection of Dr. Michael Holsapple as HESI's leader in 2002. He applied his leadership skills and his limitless source of energy to the HESI organization, and it has worked magic on the enthusiasm of the staff and board members. We were all excited by our leader's election as the vice-president of the SOT. This honor is a feather in Michael's cap and an important indication of HESI's increasing recognition as a respected and credible organization.

Most of the members of HESI are ready and willing to work, write, and function on committees. Like every volunteer organization, we have a few individuals who are difficult to motivate; however, most of the members are

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enthusiastic about meeting their responsibilities and the goals of the organization. The recent Mapping exercise initiated by Dr. Lewis Smith consumed over three years of staff and scientists' time. The manuscript describing this exercise is complete and was accepted for publication in *Critical Reviews in Toxicology*. I believe it will be an important HESI publication that will put HESI on the map (pun intended).

I remember that when I was elected for a three-year term to the Board, the rules were that you could be re-elected, but that was not a guarantee. As the years went by, I noticed that many of the colleagues who were elected with me in the early years were gone, and this happened again and again. I said to my wife, "I wonder if they have forgotten about me?" I believe I was elected five times, and I am most appreciative of the opportunities and education in toxicology that I received from HESI's activities. It has been a wonderful experience and I will continue to wish HESI future successes and important accomplishments. It is a very important international organization, and of which the membership should be very proud.

## HESI Committee to Submit a Biomarker Qualification Package to FDA

The Nephrotoxicity Working Group of the HESI Biomarkers Technical Committee will submit a voluntary biomarker qualification data package (VXDS) to the FDA at the end of April 2008. The focus of the submission will be the analytical and biological validation study data generated by the working group over the last three years on the markers RPA-1, clusterin, and alpha- and mu-GST. These data will be evaluated by FDA reviewers to assess their utility for specific preclinical safety applications.

For more information, contact Syril D. Pettit, MEM, Senior Scientific Project Manager, at [spettit@hesiglobal.org](mailto:spettit@hesiglobal.org).

## HESI Goes to Tokyo

On February 20, 2008, HESI led a well-attended outreach meeting at the Tokyo Opera City building in Tokyo, Japan. More than 40 Japan-based scientists from the pharmaceutical and chemical sectors, academia, and government attended the meeting. The session provided an important opportunity to bridge geographic and time boundaries, and have valuable face-to-face discussions with our Japanese colleagues. Dr. Michael Holsapple (HESI Executive Director), Dr. Marc Bonnefoi (sanofi-aventis and HESI Vice-President), and Ms. Syril Pettit (HESI Senior Scientific Program Manager) represented HESI at the session. The one-day program included an overview of the HESI organization and mission, as well as presentations on the biomarkers, genomics, nanotechnology, protein allergenicity, and



Attendees at the February 2008 HESI Outreach Meeting in Tokyo, Japan. (Photo by S. Pettit)

*in vitro* genotoxicity committees. Participants were offered opportunities to provide written and verbal feedback on challenges and benefits of working with the HESI organization. The need for more frequent HESI activities and



Downtown Tokyo. (Photo by S. Pettit)

a greater HESI presence in Japan emerged as strong recommendations from the session.



Drs. Makoto Hiyashi (Japan National Institute of Health Sciences), Holsapple, and Bonnefoi (left to right) discuss *in vitro* genotoxicity testing paradigms during a meeting break. (Photo by S. Pettit)

HESI looks forward to returning to Japan several times in the next 18 months with sessions at the Japan Society of Toxicology meeting, Japan Environmental Mutagen Society, and other scientific forums.

Special thanks to sanofi-aventis in Tokyo for assisting with logistical support for the meeting.