European Immunologists meet in Amsterdam

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For several decades, the European Federation of Immunological Societies (EFIS) has been organizing three-yearly meetings of broad scope and wide attendance. Each of these meetings has taken place in one of the major, attractive cities of Europe and is organized by the local immunological society. This year, the Dutch Society of Immunology will be hosting the 13th European Immunology Meeting (EIM) in the RAI congress center in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. The four-day programme is designed to cover the science of immunology in its broadest sense: from molecule to organism and from basic research to clinical science. The link between fundamental immunology and the clinic is further enhanced by the joint organization of the Fourth International Symposium on Clinical Immunology (ISCI) immediately prior to the EIM at the same location in Amsterdam. This will allow clinicians and scientists to compare notes, while simultaneously attending a meeting close to the interest of each.

The 13th EIM meeting is organized around five central themes: the Molecular basis of Immune Recognition, Ontogeny of the Immune System, Immune Effector Functions, Host-Pathogen interactions, and Medical Aspects of Immunology. Within each of these themes, four to six symposia are scheduled. Each symposium is intended to cover one coherent field: for example, tolerance, T-cell effector functions or transplantation, with allocated time for presentations from three invited speakers. The scientific committee has aimed to invite internationally renowned scientists, who have recently made major contributions to the selected topics. The level and standing of previous EIM meetings may be reflected by the unusually high rate of acceptance to speak in Amsterdam. Most of the speakers are based in one of the many European member states. However, since top-level immunological research is not restricted to Europe, a sizeable number of invited speakers comes from the USA or from elsewhere. To provide an opportunity for the many young scientists

to present and discuss their experimental work, some sixty workshops will be held. In each workshop, time will be available for 8–10 oral presentations selected from the abstracts. At the time of writing, over 2000 abstracts had been submitted for the EIM meeting. The dimensions of the meeting impose the need for simultaneous symposia and workshops. Inevitably, some participants might find themselves obliged to choose between two equally attractive events.

Historically, European immunology has been very strong. This is demonstrated by a long line of Nobel laureates in medicine, including Sir Peter Medawar for his experimental proof of the clonal selection theory proposed by his co-Nobel laureate Sir Frank Macfarlane Burnet, Jean Dausset for the genetic definition of the major histocompatibility complex (MHC), Niels Jerne for his theories on development and structure of the immune system, and Georges Koehler and Cesar Milstein for the invention of the monoclonal antibody. The latest European scientist to receive the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine is Rolf Zinkernagel. With Peter Doherty, he was nominated for the ground-breaking work on MHC restriction of the immune response. Rolf Zinkernagel will give the keynote address lecture at the opening of the EIM meeting. The contents of his lecture are highlighted in a contribution to this issue of *Immunology Today*, entitled 'Antiviral immunity'. A series of six State-of-the-Art lectures are scheduled, which are loosely connected to the five themes of the meeting. Elsewhere in this issue, you will find concise overviews written by speakers of these lectures.

European immunology continues to make major contributions to its fields of traditional strength, such as the molecular genetics and cell biology of MHC and antigen presentation, lymphocyte development, the genetics of immunodeficiency, autoimmunity, host-parasite interactions and vaccine development. In addition, several novel fields have been successfully explored. Like elsewhere in the world, European immunologists have been very effective in imple-

menting innovative molecular technologies, such as the generation of knockout mice or the characterization of antigenic peptides by physical methods. Today, immunologists often find themselves at the centre of biomedical science. Immunology, originally driven by clinical questions and observations, has developed into a discipline that provides attractive experimental model systems for fundamentally oriented molecular geneticists, developmental biologists and cell biologists. This has led to a rapid increase in the understanding of the complex workings of the immune system. Also, many new experimental tools and technologies have become available. Nevertheless, immunology has not yet come up with solutions for many of the major threats to human health. Infectious diseases like malaria or tuberculosis have not been controlled, while new diseases like AIDS have emerged; autoimmunity continues to be treated with decades-old heavy-artillery drugs, and an essentially similar situation exists with respect to the therapeutic modalities for cancer.

As will be highlighted during the meeting, a multitude of novel strategies is now being explored to combat many of these diseases. These include the application of subunit vaccination to the prevention of infectious diseases, the development of cancer vaccines, or vaccines aimed to abrogate autoimmune responses, and the treatment of allergies with (anti)interleukins. It is clear that, worldwide, biotechnology companies are playing an increasingly important role in these developments. Although somewhat slow, Europe is now also seeing the appearance of start-up biotech companies. The success of such companies and of the pharmaceutical industry in general will be important for the future of immunology. European immunology, like other biomedical disciplines performed in an academic setting, has been faced with budgetary problems in many countries. One of the major challenges of the immediate future will be to provide favourable opportunities for talented young people who are considering pursuing a career in immunology.