

SUMMARY
NIH INTERNATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES MEETING
July 10, 2007

Dr. James Herrington, Director, Division of International Relations, Fogarty International Center, welcomed the NIH IC representatives to the FIC conference room. He introduced Ann Puderbaugh, new head of the FIC Office of Communications. In addition, he called attention to an invitation from DASPA/FIC for participation in a scientific review meeting on August 29, 2007, 11:00 am to 2:00 pm in the Stone House (Building 16) for the Council of Science Editors' Global Theme Issue; the DIR "Brief", a bi-weekly sheet highlighting meetings of DIR/FIC staff; and the most recent issue of FIC's *Global Health Matters*.

Updated NIH Grants Information CD: Mr. Bruce Butrum, Chief Grants Management Officer, FIC, introduced the latest edition of the grants information CD and provided a copy to those in attendance. Mr. Butrum highlighted the revisions and additions to the CD which he developed and which has been used by ICs and investigators all over the world. For copies of CDs, ICs may order from SAAH video. The information can also be accessed from the FIC website.

NICHD-Supported Activities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA): Dr. Danuta Krotoski, Acting Associate Director for Prevention Research and International Programs, NICHD, presented an overview of NICHD activities in the MENA region, with some perspective on how those activities support some of the current priorities at NICHD, especially the interrelated areas of newborn screening, birth defects and genetic diseases. Three activities were highlighted. The first was a USAID-funded meeting held in Egypt, *Healthy Children Ready to Learn*, which led to discussions with the participating NICHD experts on possible causes for some of the learning difficulties and other disabilities, perhaps increasingly, observed in Egyptian children. Hoping to explore these questions more in depth, NICHD and Egyptian colleagues received a workshop grant from the US-Egypt Joint Science and Technology Fund to fund a workshop on newborn jaundice in March 2007. The conference brought together 450 Egyptian clinicians and researchers for three days of intense collaborative work with six U.S. experts in the field who answered NICHD's call to participate in the workshop. One outcome of the workshop was a major effort to submit a collaborative research project to the FIC Brain Disorders Program. Another was a White Paper, submitted to the Minister of Health of Egypt, with recommendations for prevention and treatment of hyperbilirubinemia, with plans for an Egyptian working group to refine and implement the recommendations. The third major activity Dr. Krotoski discussed was a major regional conference held in Marrakech, Morocco in November 2006 on the subject of newborn screening. NICHD brought in multiple partners from amongst the ICs, HHS agencies, other USG agencies, health agencies from Europe, multilateral organizations, NGOs, advocacy organizations, the private sector and the Ministry of Health of Morocco. The meeting produced the *Marrakech Declaration*, authored the representatives and scientists from the region, outlining future goals in the region for newborn screening programs. On-going work includes a website, soon to reside at NICHD, as well as an international working group. This group is planning for the next regional conference and will likely provide training opportunities.

NIAID-Supported Research Activities Past and Present in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA): Dr. Karl Western, Senior International Research Advisor, NIAID, presented an historical and current perspective on his Institute's work in the region, which dates back some decades to USAID programs for regional collaborations in infectious disease research. Since that time, NIAID investments in the region have not kept pace proportionally to the growth of NIAID funding in most other regions. By pointing to the critical role played by well-established NIAID relationships with labs in China at the time of the SARS outbreak, Dr. Western illustrated the weakness in that MENA situation, given NIAID's role in global disease outbreaks and its expanded mission in biodefense research. As the NIAID representative on the FIC-organized trip with the NIH Director in January 2006 to North Africa, (NICHD, NLM and FIC also participated), Dr. Western met with senior lab directors and, upon his return, was able to utilize a mechanism within the Office of Global Research, NIAID, to fund two young researchers, one from Morocco and one from Tunisia, for short training periods in laboratories of US scientists conducting research in NIAID priority areas. While collecting the data for his presentation on NIAID-funded extramural awards in the region, Dr. Western observed that, while they were few, there were, proportionally, an unusually large number of direct awards and most of the awards, both direct and in collaboration with US institutions, were made recently. Finally, beginning with meetings in 2004 between the Director of the National Institute of Hygiene in Rabat, Morocco and Dr. Western, NIAID has established an excellent working relationship with that institution, which holds an almost-equivalent position in the Moroccan science/health structure as NIAID in the U.S.

Other ICs Supporting MENA Activities: Dr. Joe Harford, Director, NCI Office of International Affairs, was on travel during this IC reps meeting, but will give a comprehensive overview of NCI activities in the region at a future meeting. CAPT Philip Budashewitz, NCI Office of International Affairs, kindly agreed to an on-the-spot report of NCI activities in the Middle East and North Africa. The best-known of these is support for the Middle East Cancer Consortium (MECC), catalyzed by the NCI Director in 1996 through an official agreement of the Ministries of Health of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority. Turkey joined in June 2004. Since its inception, MECC's major activities have been through the Cancer Registry Project and the Small Grants Programme. Another major involvement has been with the King Hussein Cancer Center in Amman, Jordan, where an NCI scientist was seconded as Medical Director to oversee, with technical assistance from NCI colleagues, the development of a state-of-the-art cancer treatment center.

Dr. Dianne Rausch, Deputy Director of the Center for Mental Health Research on AIDS, NIMH, reported briefly on the May 2007 meeting in Tunis, Tunisia on Behavioral and Social Sciences Research on HIV/AIDS in the MENA region. The meeting, sponsored by OAR/OD/NIH, was an outgrowth of an NIAID meeting held in Egypt in February 2006 and a follow-up to that at the Toronto AIDS conference during which some of the participants in the Egypt meeting expressed the need for a regional meeting to help outline a research agenda that addresses behavioral and social sciences priorities for HIV/AIDS epidemiology and prevention, access to care, and treatment. Participants included scientists from seven countries in the region, as well as US academics and staff from seven NIH ICs. A trans-NIH working group continues to work on these issues.

NIH IC Information and Announcements:

- The NICHD representative announced a talk by Dr. Abdelaziz Sefiani on genetics in the Middle East, to be held in the Stone House (Building 16) on July 31 at 9:00 am.
- The NCI representative reported that there are currently 40 scientists participating in the NCI Summer Course in Cancer Prevention, both as direct applicants to the program and as IAEA/PACT participants. About two-thirds are foreign scientists and one-third from the U.S.
- The NCI representative also announced a call for proposals to the U.S.-Japan Cooperative Cancer Research Program (USJCCRP). More information and an application form can be found at <http://www.cancer.gov/oia/US-JAPAN-CCRP>.
- Ms. Tina Chung, DIR/FIC, called attention to the notices for the Embassy Science Fellows positions she has been circulating to IC Reps and asked once again for wide distribution to appropriate staff.
- Dr. Lois Cohen, NIDCR, announced that Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of WHO has agreed to present the Barnes Lecture this year, scheduled for December 10, 2007.

Next Meeting: Tentatively set for Wednesday, September 12, 2007, at 1 p.m. in a location to be determined.

Attendance:

Dr. James Herrington, Acting Chairperson; NIAID: Karl Western, Ranjan Gupta; NICHD: Danuta Krotoski, Sorrel Namaste; NIDCD: Lana Shekim; OAR: Natalie Tomitch; NCI: Phil Budashewitz, Makeda Williams, Mary Fischietto; NLM: Cheri Philip; NIMH: Dianne Rausch; NIDCR: Lois Cohen, Eleni Kousvelari; NEI: Mary Frances Cotch; NCCAM: Deborah Hayes; ORWH: Erika Elvander; CSR: Dan Gerendasy; OTT/OD: Bonnie Harbinger; FIC: Ann Puderbaugh, Bruce Butrum, Tina Chung, Judy Levin, Cooper Lloyd, Milagros Ruiz.