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1. PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The highlight of the last quarter was the 23rd Annual Scientific Meeting in Sydney (see photos on page 3). Andrew Bleasel and his ASM Committee are to be congratulated on organising a highly successful meeting. The ASM was attended by 226 delegates and featured symposia on epilepsy surgery and antiepileptic drug treatment. The invited overseas speakers, Prof Byung-in Lee from Seoul and Prof Phylippe Ryvlin from Lyon, provided an enlightening international perspective to the symposia. The ASM was evaluated highly by delegates and a small profit was made by the Society. Planning has commenced for the 2009 ASM in Perth.

The lowlight of the quarter was Medicare's rejection of the Society's MSAC application for procedural item numbers for vagus nerve stimulation (VNS), MSAC stating a lack of evidence for efficacy and a recommending that we continue with the "current public funding arrangement". On November 17th, I met in Canberra with the Chair and members of MSAC but failed to persuade them to reconsider their decision. To add to the disappointment, MSAC advised that VNS devices will be removed from the Prosthesis List, such that there will no longer be access to VNS for privately-insured patients, other than by paying outright for the device and surgical fees. This is an

extremely disappointing outcome that has prompted the ESA and the non-medical epilepsy organisations to consider making representations to the Federal Government about VNS, and funding of the epilepsy sector in general.

On a brighter note, I take this opportunity to wish you the very best for 2009. I hope you found some time for rest and relaxation over the summer, prior to returning what will undoubtedly be a challenging year ahead, on several local and international fronts. The Executive is looking forward to a productive (last) year in charge of the ESA.

(In case you were wondering what happened to the Spring 2008 edition... Global warming!) □

2. FINANCIAL MATTERS

The Society's financial position remains solid. Accounting has been reorganized with separation of operating and project expenses, and the setting up of an account for the Society to receive tax-deductible donations and bequests. After this financial year, the ESA is expected to move into a position of regular profits, having raised subscription fees to meet regular administrative expenses, ceased recurrent funding of some projects, and having sought external funding for all the fellowships. With the financial downturn, there will be reduced income from investments and possibly reduced sponsorship of our educational and scientific activities.

The Society thanks Carol Ireland (CEO, Epilepsy Action) for putting a couple interested in bequeathing money for epilepsy research in contact with the ESA. If members are approached by patients, families or organisations interested in donating or bequeathing money for epilepsy research, please consider the ESA, as we now have the facility to receive

and direct funds appropriately. □

3. MEMBERSHIP

Following the membership drive leading up to the ASM, the ESA has 231 financial members. There are 338 "active" members, including recently lapsed members and NZ ILAE members, with whom the ESA communicates. If you have not already renewed your 2008-9 membership, please do so by the end of January. Also, please suggest to your neurologist, neurosurgical, nursing, research and allied health colleagues working in epilepsy that they consider joining the ESA. □

4. ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC MEETING

Planning for the 2009 ASM is underway. Lakshmi Nagarajan is the Convenor of the meeting, to be held at the Perth Convention Centre between November 2-4, 2009. If you have suggestions for topics or speakers, please contact Lakshmi or one of the ASM Committee members. Also, if you have views on the style or content of the ASM, please forward your comments to a member of the ASM Committee or Executive. □

5. ASIA AND OCEANIA

The venue and date of the 8th Asian Oceanian Epilepsy Congress were announced by the ILAE/IBE. The Congress will be held at the Melbourne Conference and Exhibition Centre on October 21-24, 2010. The Congress will be jointly hosted by the ESA and the JECA, and will replace an ESA meeting in 2010. Preliminary planning is underway and ESA members who are interested in

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contributing to the program should contact Simon Harvey or Terry O'Brien. The formal Organising Committee is yet to be formed. □

6. SUBCOMMITTEE UPDATES

Driving The DLAs in NSW and Victoria are presently trialing a decision-tree model of assessing fitness to drive, with the responsibility being moved from the doctor to the DLA in making this decision. Neurologists in NSW and Victoria will receive some extra paperwork with the old forms, as part of this trial.

The law was recently changed in Western Australia to bring it in line with the rest of Australia, mandating patients to report any medical condition that might affect their fitness to drive. The ESA continues to oppose mandatory reporting by doctors, though this remains law in South Australia and will be reviewed in an upcoming Coronial inquest in Victoria.

Drugs and Devices The Drugs and Devices subcommittee finalised the ESA position statements on generic AEDs and the issue of increased suicidality with AED prescription. These can be found on the ESA website at

<http://www.epilepsy-society.org.au/pages/guidelines1.php>.

After reviewing the ESA's position and meeting with Dan McLaughlin and Simon Harvey, the National Prescribing Service recently agreed to modify its information to prescribers and pharmacists to recommend that AEDs be considered as "critical dose medicines", in which small changes in doses or levels from brand changes might have clinically-significant outcomes.

With regards to the alleged increase in suicidality with AEDs, the FDA recently (16/12/08) reissued its

warning, despite strong opposition from the US neurological community.

EEG The ANZAN EEG syllabus and training information is currently available on the website. □

7. AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The ESA congratulates the recipients of the following scholarships and awards, some of whom were recognised in Sydney during the ASM:

- Molly McDonnell Foundation Scholarship: Dr Sandra Petty, who will conduct research on AEDs and bone health at the Royal Melbourne Hospital with Prof Terry O'Brien.
- UCB Pharma Clinical Scholarship: Dr Meng Tan, who will train further in epileptology with Prof Terry O'Brien at the Royal Melbourne Hospital
- Janssen-Cilag Asian Oceanian Scholarship: Dr Li Chen from Guangzhou, China who will train in epileptology with Dr Andrew Bleasel at Westmead Hospital.
- ESA Best ASM Platform: Slave Petrovski.
- ESA Best ASM Poster: Douglas Crompton.
- ESA travel scholarships to attend the AES: Slave Petrovski, Caroline Ng.

The ESA is grateful to the Molly McDonnell Foundation, UCB Pharma and Janssen-Cilag for sponsoring these fellowships. Details of these and other awards can be found at

http://www.epilepsy-society.org.au/pages/awards_pbaward.php □

8. OTHER NEWS

The ILAE Executive 2009-13 election process is presently underway. The first round is complete, with Prof Solomon (Nico) Moshe having been elected President. Nominations for Office Bearers are being considered by the ILAE.

The ESA joined the Australian Pregnancy Register and the George

Institute (SEISMIC Project) as partners in their applications to the NHMRC for Partnership Grants. Applications will be reviewed and short listed early in 2009.

Those who attended the ASM in Sydney will recall Prof Ryvlin's presentation on the Mortality in Epilepsy Monitoring Units Study (MORTEMUS). Prof Ryvlin is keen to obtain data from Australian epilepsy monitoring units about their monitoring practices and any deaths or near-deaths associated with video-EEG monitoring. Andrew Bleasel is coordinating this. □

9. UPCOMING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

April 1-4

8th Biennial Convention of the ASEAN Neurological Association
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

May 2-4

Australian and New Zealand Child Neurology Society Meeting
Wellington, New Zealand

May 3-6

2nd International Epilepsy Colloquium: Pediatric Epilepsy Surgery
Lyon, France

May 18-22

Australian and New Zealand Association of Neurologists Annual Scientific Meeting
Christchurch, New Zealand

June 28 - July 2

28th International Epilepsy Congress (ILAE & IBE)
Budapest, Hungary

Details for these conferences, and others, can be found at

<http://www.epilepsy-society.org.au/pages/conferences.php> □

Epilepsy Society of Australia

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