

Historical Perspective: Tear Film & Ocular Surface Society Conferences

It all began with a moongate.

In the mid-1970s when I was a graduate student at Dartmouth Medical School (Hanover, NH, USA), one of my mentors, the internationally renowned steroid endocrinologist, Allan Munck, held an exclusive meeting of approximately 25 scientific experts from around the world in a mansion behind a moongate in Bermuda. I was not invited. But, I thought the meeting was a great idea. I dreamt that if I ever became a faculty member, I would also like to organize a scientific conference behind a moongate in Bermuda and invite people from all over the world.

The dream came true in November 1992. After seeking input from many individuals, I organized the 1st International Conference on the Lacrimal Gland, Tear Film and Dry Eye Syndromes: Basic Science and Clinical Relevance. This meeting was held in the Southampton Princess, located behind a moongate in Bermuda. The goals of that Conference were to:

- Assess critically the current knowledge and 'state of the art' research on the structure and function of tear-film producing tissues, tears and the ocular surface in both health and disease
- Promote an international exchange of information that will be of value to basic scientists, eye care practitioners and pharmaceutical companies with an interest in the treatment of lacrimal gland, tear film and ocular surface disorders
- Result in a book, that will contain summaries of the Conference's presentations, and provide an educational foundation and scientific reference for research on the tear film, ocular surface and dry eye syndromes

The 3-day Conference attracted 175 registered participants from all over the world, featured 133 scientific presentations, and resulted in a 729-page Proceedings book (*Adv Exp Med Biol* 1994, vol 350). One Conference outcome, as cited in the book, was Michael Lemp's proposal "... I propose an academic-clinical practice-industry-governmental effort to develop a consensus" for designing clinical trials for the evaluation of treatments for dry eye syndrome ... which led to his organization of the National Eye Institute/Industry Workshop on Clinical Trials in Dry Eyes.

One more outcome was that numerous people wanted another Conference. Consequently, I organized a sequel, which was also held in Bermuda in November 1996. This 3-day meeting was designed with the same objectives, involved 230 participants and 162 presentations, and resulted in a 1,051-page book (*Adv Exp Med Biol* 1998, vol 438). The

success of this Conference, in turn, led to my organization of the 3rd Conference in Maui in November 2000 (310 participants, 233 presentations and a 1,385-page book [*Adv Exp Med Biol* 2002, vol 506A & B]).

And the Conferences continued ... Puerto Rico in 2004 (400 participants and 270 presentations, with abstracts published in *The Ocular Surface*, vol 3, #1 Supplement), and Taormina, Italy, in 2007 (500 participants and 261 presentations). These meetings were described by participants as "excellent," "elegant," "most enjoyable," "scientifically outstanding," and "perfect." Further, the burgeoning interest in the tear film and ocular surface led the Cornea Disease Panel to recommend increased research funding in this area in the NIH National Plan for Eye and Vision Research.

Most recently, I directed, and my daughter Amy organized, the 6th International Conference in Florence, Italy (September 2010; 600 participants and almost 300 presentations). The highlights of the Conference platform sessions appear in this issue of *The Ocular Surface* (TOS), and were written by a medical/graduate student, Julia Dieckow, of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Halle, Germany). I compliment Julia on her superb effort.

One of the most remarkable achievements of these Conferences is that they prompted the creation of the non-profit Tear Film & Ocular Surface Society (TFOS). TFOS is a global community, whose mission is to advance the research, literacy, and educational aspects of the scientific field of the tear film and ocular surface throughout the world. TFOS was launched right before the 3rd Conference, and now has a distribution to over 4,000 basic scientists, clinical researchers and industry representatives in more than 70 countries.

TFOS activities have helped to promote increased international awareness of external eye diseases, enhance governmental funding for tear film and ocular surface research, stimulate the development of therapeutic drugs and diagnostic devices, influence the design and conduct of clinical trials of new and unique treatments for ocular surface disorders, and facilitate the growth of TOS into the 3rd highest ranked ophthalmic journal in the world.

Legend has it that people who walk through a moongate are blessed with good fortune and a joyful and prosperous future. This moongate experience has certainly brought good fortune to TFOS and TOS, and may well lead to a joyful and prosperous future for tear film and ocular surface research.

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