

To be a member of the International Society of Nephrology

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The kind invitation of Fernando Carrera, Editor-in-Chief of the Portuguese Journal of Nephrology and Hypertension, to contribute an Editorial to the first 2010 issue of the journal is a welcome opportunity to present to the members of the Portuguese Society of Nephrology important new aspects of the International Society of Nephrology (ISN). Since this year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the ISN, 2010 is an historical landmark and appropriate time to revisit the updated ISN mission, review the present activities and comment on what may be important reasons for Portuguese nephrologists to join or renew their membership in the ISN.

In the ISN Executive Committee Retreat in Dublin in 2008, it was agreed that a new formulation of our mission was necessary to better define the nature and aims of the society in the current era. The mission statement now emphasizes the philanthropic characteristic of ISN, and it states in its entirety:

“The international Society of Nephrology is dedicated to the advancing the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of kidney diseases in the developing and developed world. It will achieve this philanthropic mission through collaborations, meetings, publications, outreach and other activities; raise public awareness of the importance of early recognition and treatment of kidney diseases; connect professionals interested in kidney and related diseases around the world; support research to achieve optimal care of the people with kidney diseases; provide nephrology education and training worldwide and

ultimately reduce the frequency and impact of kidney diseases and their associated conditions”.

The uniqueness of ISN as a medical society rests, in large measure, on the philanthropic nature of our activities that are coordinated by the Commission for the Global Advancement of Nephrology (COMGAN) which has the largest non-managerial budget allocation of the society. The humanitarian nature of COMGAN’s programs are structured on the basis of volunteer participation of their members in five committees: The Research and Prevention Committee, the Renal Sister Centre Committee, the Continued Medical Education (CME) committee, the Fellowship Committee and the Educational Advisory Committee. Briefly, the Research and Prevention Committee funds, each year, six research projects in developing world centers and collects data from ongoing programs in the Kidney Disease Data Center in Bergamo, under the direction of Dr Giuseppe Remuzzi. The Sister Centre Program, presently under the direction of Dr. Paul Harden of Oxford, links renal units in underdeveloped countries and world-class units elsewhere with the aim to create autonomous nephrology groups in disadvantaged regions of the world that can respond appropriately to the local demands of care for patients with renal disease. The CME activities are directed by Dr. Norbert Lameire of Ghent, and provide 40-50 events each year that reach 10.000-12.000 renal health care providers all over the world. The Fellowship Program, presently directed by Dr. David Harris of Sidney, supports about 40 nephrologists from underdeveloped countries each

year to receive training for 3-24 months in specific areas of clinical nephrology, epidemiology, laboratory techniques or educational methods that would have immediate and practical application in their own countries upon their return. The Educational Advisory Committee, chaired by Dr. Sarala Naicker of Johannesburg, is charged with the coordination of ISN educational activities and is now implementing an ISN Ambassador program that will support short (1-2 weeks) visits of qualified experts to renal centers in the developing world to address with a hands-on approach specific needs of the region.

From this brief outline of activities (for specific details see www.isn-online.org/society/outreach/index.html) it is obvious that ISN places a paramount emphasis on the humanitarian role that their mission demands and thereby provides what is surely a major motivation for all nephrologists to become ISN members and support these activities. Only 18 Portuguese nephrologists are members of the ISN, a drastic reduction from four-five years ago when the number of Portuguese ISN members reached 220. These figures likely reflect the fact that the decision to join or maintain membership in a medical society is usually made on a cost-benefit evaluation of the annual dues, on one hand, and the advantages the society offers to the clinical or academic practice of individual members, on the other. By this criterion, the motivation to become an ISN member for nephrologists in developed countries would be the benefits of full-text access to *Kidney International*, *Nature Nephrology Reviews*, the *Nephrology Gateway* and a reduced registration rate in the *World Congresses of Nephrology*. Obviously, these membership advantages, important as they are, do not constitute the compelling reasons to join the society they once were since *World Congresses*

of Nephrology are biannual events and institutional access to full-text articles in the journals is now available on line in practically all countries of the developed world. Travel grants and fellowships are also available to society members on a competitive basis. However, we would emphasize that the most important motivation for a Portuguese nephrologist to be an ISN member is largely unrecognized or, at least, insufficiently emphasized: ISN members are the only international force that keeps active a worldwide humanitarian effort centered in nephrology. Not only do membership dues support this global philanthropic enterprise outlined above, but by joining the ISN, recognized leaders of our specialty and their colleagues express their willingness to contribute with their time and knowledge to programs and activities that have a positive impact on the care of patients with renal disease in many disadvantaged populations of the world.

In the dawn of this year in which we celebrate half a century of our society, it is fitting that we present to you a renewed invitation to be a member of the ISN and to join with us and 8000 other nephrologists around the globe in declaring your commitment to helping your less advantaged colleagues and their patients in developing parts of this world we share together. Finally, we ask you to share with us any suggestions you may have that will help us to better fulfill our mission and to serve you more efficiently; I can assure you that we will give your ideas the most careful consideration.

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