

History of the World Allergy Organization: XVII ICACI, Sydney 2000–Innovations for the New Millennium

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History of the World Allergy Organization: In 1951, the leaders in allergy from all over the world came together to form the International Association of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (IAACI). For the next 60 years, the allergy world converged at the IAACI triennial meetings, which became biennial in 2003. The international meetings, originally named the International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology, are now the World Allergy Congress hosted by the World Allergy Organization (WAO). Everyone who has aspired to have worldwide recognition has played a part in IAACI-WAO. The History of the WAO traces the global arc of the allergy field over the past 60 years.

The current officers of WAO elected to focus on this rich history, inviting prominent leaders who are interested in being part of this history project to write about their time with IAACI-WAO. This series will be presented in Cancún, México as part of the XXII World Allergy Congress (December 4–8, 2011). Leading up to the Congress in Cancún, the WAO Journal is presenting segments of the History as part of the “Notes of Allergy Watchers Series.” Please enjoy.

—Michael A. Kaliner, MD
Historian, and Past-President (2006–2007)
World Allergy Organization

The XVIII International Congress of Allergology & Clinical Immunology (ICACI) in Sydney, Australia, 15 to 20 October 2000 was notable for a meeting of “firsts.”

It was the first time:

- The name World Allergy Organization (WAO) was used, as it would soon replace International Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (IAACI)
- A World Allergy Awareness Day was held (now known as World Allergy Week)
- Abstracts were accepted by online submission and the last time a paper system was used
- A formal, written contract was signed between the IAACI and the host organization and partners, the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy

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(ASCIA) and the Asia Pacific Association of Allergology and Clinical Immunology (APAACI)

- Feedback forms were used to gauge participants response to the scientific program.

SCIENTIFIC PROGRAM FIRSTS

There were a number of program innovations introduced for the first time in Sydney. These included convening meetings for 2 working parties whose brief was to prepare position statements to be published in the journal of the IAACI. The first, “Allergy/Immunology Training,” was chaired by Drs Lanny Rosenwasser, Patrick Hogan, and Allan Becker. The brief was to produce guidelines for minimal requirements for IAACI to recommend to its constituents for acceptable training in the discipline of Allergy/Clinical Immunology. This was the forerunner for the training documents now produced by the WAO.

The second, “Indoor Allergen Survey and Monitoring” was cochaired by Drs Martin Chapman, William Thomas, and Thomas Platts-Mills.

Debates at the end of the day were very popular, and the debate format is now an integral part of WAO meetings (the World Allergy Congress). Breakfast sessions, held for the first time at a WAO meeting were not only popular but proved lucrative for the organization as they attracted a separate fee. Vigorous discussion occurred over lunch at the poster discussion sessions that were conducted in the poster display area with everyone gathered around the chosen posters. This was something that had always been successful and popular at ASCIA national meetings and was similarly a success at the Congress. Finally, a Postgraduate program, with separate registration, was introduced at the Sydney meeting and has been a tradition at WAO Congresses ever since.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A Local Organizing Committee (LOC), which was based in Sydney, managed the conference. Along with Drs Robert Loblay and Janet Rimmer, I had been involved in preparing and presenting the bid to the IAACI Board of Directors. After we won the bid, the local organizing committee officebearers were:

Prof. Anthony Basten, Chairperson
Dr Connie Katelaris, Secretary-General
Dr Janet Rimmer, Treasurer
Prof. Ronald Walls, Convenor, Scientific Program
Dr Robert Loblay, Committee Member

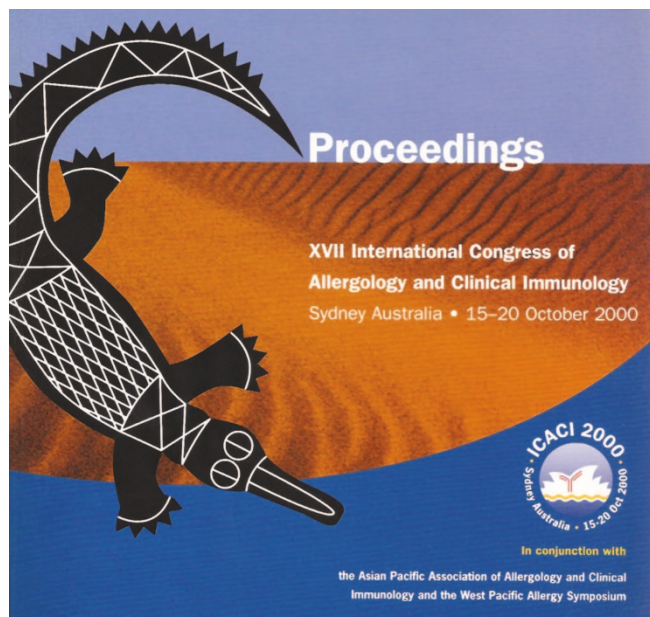


FIGURE 1. From the cover of the Proceedings of the XVII International Congress of Allergology and Clinical Immunology.

The committee was convened soon after the successful bid in Stockholm. We enjoyed the full support of IAACI/WAO President, Prof. S. Gunnar Johansson, who encouraged and guided us through the various hoops!

An Associates Committee, consisting of Alexandra Ruhno, Cecilia Yan, and Bronwyn Solley, was established 2 years before the meeting. They took on the responsibility for the organization of the Accompanying Persons Program and reported back to the LOC periodically.

A Local Scientific Committee was established from the full ASCIA membership. One face-to-face meeting of the committee was held, the remainder of the work conducted by phone, fax, and email. This committee made suggestions and recommendations regarding program content, possible speakers, and suggested formats.

The abstract review process is a major undertaking at every Congress. This was undertaken by the LOC and an international panel invited to participate by Prof. Johansson. This panel included:

Prof. Bee Wah Lee, Singapore, representing APAACI
 Prof. Hisao Tomioka, Japan
 Prof. Anthony Frew, United Kingdom, representing the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI)
 Dr. Allen Kaplan, United States of America, President-Elect, IAACI/WAO

Tony Frew's experience and expertise were very valuable for guiding this complex process. We made this as pleasant an experience as possible, holding the meeting in the Hunter Valley where we enjoyed good food and wine once the hard work was completed.

STATISTICS

More than 3,000 registrants from 85 countries came to Sydney for ICACI 2000 to enjoy the science, friendship, and all the social activities on offer in this year 2000 Olympic City.

There were 266 speakers from 40 countries participating in the Scientific Program. There were 916 abstracts received from participants in 65 countries.

The Sydney 2000 meeting was regarded as a transition meeting by IAACI, with a decision made to phase out written Conference Proceedings. Thus, we decided on a smaller publication, highlighting some, but not all, symposia.

SOCIAL PROGRAM

Without a doubt, the highlight of the Social Program was the All Congress Event held at Olympic Park to watch the first night of Paralympic competition; an opportunity probably never to be repeated!

A strong indigenous theme created a memorable opening ceremony universally praised by visitors intrigued by the Aboriginal dancing and ceremonies. At the Presidents' Dinner invited guests enjoyed the more informal Australian style and the surprise element with the "Singing Waiters." Dr Allen Kaplan was given a surprise presentation on the occasion of his "significant birthday" that coincided with this event.

There were many challenges for us in hosting our first ICACI: distance and cost of air travel was a big issue, but this was counterbalanced by the attraction of the "Best Olympics Ever"; a spectacular setting (Sydney Harbor, the Opera House); great before and after tourist opportunities to the Australian Outback, Cairns, Great Barrier Reef, New Zealand; and excellent spring weather.

For the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, hosting the ICACI 2000 proved to be a great watershed. It improved the standing of our members and society in the international community, and the profit made was used for very specific purposes that have strengthened the practice of allergy in Australia: the establishment of the first Chair of Pediatric Allergy, and a Scholarship Program fostering the careers of young allergists.

For the Organizing Committee who had taken this venture through from the bid in 1994 to the successful conclusion of the Congress in October 2000, the rewards were many. We all remain close friends and feel we can organize anything! We had a wonderful relationship with Prof. Johansson who shared our vision, recognized our capabilities and allowed us to run with it in a manner I believe is very rare for these events. Prof. Johansson discovered Australia and has visited many times. He and Anna Stina have seen more of the continent than most Australians, and we have developed a lasting and close friendship.

Looking back now, they were halcyon days (pre-9/11) before the world changed forever!