



Presidential Address

January 2012

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Together with my colleagues at the World Allergy Organization (WAO), I wish you a very happy, healthy and prosperous New Year!

I am humbled, honored and privileged to assume the role of President of the World Allergy Organization (2012-2013). I am deeply grateful to my predecessor, Richard Lockey, for his leadership and outstanding contributions to WAO during his presidency, and the members of the Executive Committee and Board of 2010-2011. I am inspired by their commitment to WAO and all of their achievements. Indeed, the growth of WAO has been propelled collectively by the individuals and all the past presidents and past members of the WAO Board and Executive Committee. I look forward to continuing this important work towards fulfilling the mission of WAO.

In this endeavor, I am joined by my colleagues on the Executive Committee – Lanny Rosenwasser (President-Elect), Mario Sánchez-Borges (Secretary-General), Stephen T. Holgate (Treasurer) and Richard F. Lockey (Past-President) — as well as the [2012-2013 Board of Directors](#) who represent the major regions of the world — Asia Pacific, Europe, Middle East/Africa, North America, and Latin America:

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| <i>Historian:</i> | Tari Haahtela (Finland) |
| G. Walter Canonica (Italy) | Elham Hossny (Egypt) |
| <i>Members-at-Large:</i> | Juan Carlos Ivancevich (Argentina) |
| Ignacio Ansotegui (Spain) | Francesca Levi-Schaffer (Israel) |
| Claus Bachert (Belgium) | Susan Prescott (Australia) |
| Michael Blaiss (USA) | Nelson Rosário Filho (Brazil) |
| Motohiro Ebisawa (Japan) | Hugh Sampson (USA) |
| Roy Gerth van Wijk (The Netherlands) | Tatiana Slavyanskaya (Russia) |
| Sandra González-Díaz (México) | Dana Wallace (USA) |

With their continued support and that of the WAO Member Societies our very dedicated WAO staff in Milwaukee, I am confident that we will be steadfast in addressing the pressing challenges, and in the next two years our accomplishments will be many — within WAO as well as in the larger allergy, asthma and clinical immunology community.

On behalf of all of us, I am most pleased to welcome Ms. Jennie Smazik who has just recently assumed the post of Executive Director for WAO. Over her years of service in WAO, Jennie has distinguished herself as a person with dedication, integrity, and professionalism. We are confident that she and her team will continue to make outstanding contributions to WAO.

WAO has just celebrated 60 years as an organization (1951-2011) and has a long list of achievements. As an organization, WAO has expanded to a federation of 89 allergy, asthma and immunology [societies](#), and continues to grow. WAO has created strong outreach and education programs, hosted [international scientific conferences](#) that bring together the best minds in allergy/immunology, and developed numerous key [publications](#) with representation from its member societies with expertise from around the world. Through this work, WAO

has helped to [define](#) what it is to be an allergist and identified the specialized training, education, and services that are needed in order to diagnose allergic diseases and care for patients who suffer from them. WAO has provided [outreach and support](#) in areas of the world where these resources are greatly needed, toward the goal of ensuring that care for patients with allergic diseases can be available anywhere in the world. After a wealth of achievements, however, a great deal of work still needs to be done to reach that goal.

I am proud to be given this wonderful opportunity, and I will continue the leadership of WAO in its position as a global authority in allergy, asthma and clinical immunology. I see a true need to accelerate the pace of our work because of the escalating prevalence, complexity and severity of allergic diseases including asthma. The prevalence is especially seen in children and young adults who bear the greatest burden of these trends. However, efforts to target allergic diseases are still very fragmented. In order to address this escalating major global health challenge that threatens health and economies alike, it is important to have a global action plan, and one that includes partnerships involving different stakeholders from countries at all economic levels. WAO took steps in this direction with the recently published **WAO White Book on Allergy** which provides a comprehensive view of the problem, includes reports from its national member societies about the current state of allergy/immunology resources in their countries, and offers recommendations for action.

During the next two years WAO will continue to address the unmet global health problem of severe and complex allergies and the need for an integrated approach toward early diagnosis and preventative strategies. With the active collaboration of the Board of Directors, I will work to promote education, research and advocacy on this theme, reaching out to our member societies and other organizations. Several key elements will drive our efforts:

Globalize, harmonize and integrate. Over the past 60 years, WAO has demonstrated the excellent results achieved by the best minds from around the world coming together to do the critical work. Starting with the development of a Global Allergy Action Plan, WAO will pursue more opportunities for integration such as participation in global leadership meetings and initiatives, development of a vibrant education research trust to support research and surveys on the burden of disease, and interaction with regulatory bodies and policy makers.

Collaborate, communicate. Global partnerships of multi-disciplinary teams involving policymakers, other global organizations, advocacy groups, medical professionals of other disciplines, academia and industry, can significantly help to reduce the burden of allergic diseases and asthma. One important example of this kind of combined effort is WAO's collaboration with EAACI, AAAAI and ACAAI in the International Collaboration on Asthma and Allergy (iCAALL) initiative, which among other projects, is developing consensus documents referred to as ICONs that are of international scope and authored by experts from all the regions of the world. WAO will also intensify efforts to disseminate information and encourage dialog about this global health concern through its [website](#) and [journal](#).

Innovate and strive for excellence. Creating the right incentives for the pursuit of evidence-based single and complex interventions requires attention to economic appraisal, cost-benefit comparison and cost utility in our analyses. In addition, it is important to continually identify and promulgate new ideas regarding prevention, disease progression, co-morbidities and new therapies targeted toward unmet needs. WAO's efforts to identify and bridge the current gaps will include initiatives such as centers of excellence, a scientific advisory group and cutting edge scientific programming at the WAO congresses and conferences. The upcoming WAO International Scientific Conference ([WISC 2012](#)) in

Hyderabad, India, for example, has an outstanding program on the theme of *Severe allergies, severe asthma: New strategies for optimal treatment and prevention*.

Focus on the priorities. While expanding the reach to involve other stakeholders, WAO will continue advocacy efforts and help to answer needs in the areas and countries of the world we haven't reached yet. Along with activities of the Emerging Societies Program (ESP), which is a collaboration with ACAAI, WAO will also continue to provide online education initiatives, develop undergraduate and post-graduate training with a global perspective, and disseminate information on critical topics including drug allergy, severe asthma, occupational allergy, severe allergies, chronic rhino sinusitis, and others. Much of this hard work is underway by the members of the WAO Scientific & Clinical Issues Council and its issue-specific Special Committees as well as the Specialty & Training Council and the Education Council. Several position papers and statements will be ready for publication in 2012.

Be inclusive and ensure the future of allergy. WAO will interact with its member societies to incorporate the views of our member constituencies toward greater effectiveness. Much work remains in order to increase the number of countries represented in the WAO membership, especially those from lower and middle income countries where allergy is changing so spectacularly. To help ensure the future of the field, WAO has also begun to increase the involvement of young people by establishing a [junior member group](#) and will continue to do so with research fellowships, travel grants, and training schools.

A Call to Action

By increasing expertise, we increase capacity to meet the challenge of this global public health concern, and increased capacity leads to better care while also ensuring the future of the specialty. Increasing expertise includes better training of existing practitioners and recruiting new people into the specialty and training them well. There is a global knowledge gap that needs to be bridged, and knowledge is the core of better care. In many areas of the world knowledge, training, and service provision are still greatly needed. Allergy/immunology specialists in most parts of the world are not in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the patient load. Primary care physicians and others see most of these patients with asthma and allergic/immunologic disorders. WAO is positioned to continue to address these training, education, outreach, and advocacy needs in collaboration with its member societies and partners around the world.

Dear colleagues and friends around the world: Let us reflect on our shared responsibilities to our patients at the grassroots level, and together let us fulfill this dream.

The WAO Board of Directors and I look forward to welcoming you to the exciting, state-of-the-art scientific program at WISC 2012 in the culturally historic and modern city of Hyderabad, India (6-9 December).

Yours sincerely,

Ruby Pawankar, MD, PhD, FAAAAI
President, World Allergy Organization