



Meeting report

Exploring the possibilities of aging intervention, prevention and therapy

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“Different” is the word that comes to mind while trying to describe the 10th Congress of the International Association of Biomedical Gerontology (IABG), held in Cambridge, UK, from 19 to 23 September 2003. Indeed, this meeting on aging, age-related diseases, anti-aging and longevity extension titled *Strategies for Engineered Negligible Senescence* was quantitatively and qualitatively different from what is normally seen happening several times a year all around the world.

Already, more than a year ago, Aubrey de Grey, the chief organizer of the meeting, had proclaimed that he did not want to waste time going through the same kind of descriptive talks given by the same group of people to the same flock of audience. His initial list of invited speakers had almost totally ignored the more familiar and regular biogerontologists, except for a few. However, the final list of speakers, poster presenters and participants was not that much skewed, and the participation by more than 260 individuals from almost 30 countries made this congress as the most successful one in the IABG-series, which has been running for the last 20 years. But, while trying to accommodate and not to upset several regulars like myself, Aubrey ended up having an overloaded programme comprising more than 20 speakers each day followed by after-dinner poster sessions. It was a challenge to keep up with everything going on, and as a result, not many participants had the physical and mental stamina to attend each and every lecture or to checkout all the posters.

The success of the meeting was not simply due to the number of participants, or the great academic location at the Queens' College in Cambridge, or the almost-perfect working of the audio-visual system, or the fantastic catering service or the most efficient co-ordination and organization. That is how a

meeting should be organized. The real success of the meeting was in bringing together a spectrum of thinkers, researchers, dreamers, critics, industrialists and practitioners, which has not been seen before. For example, there were philosophers of science and bioethicists, such as John Harris (Manchester, UK), Arthur Caplan (Pennsylvania, USA), Gregory Stock (Los Angeles, USA), and John Davis (Greenville, USA) discussing the pros and cons of anti-aging and longevity extension therapies. Then there were realists such as Jay Olshansky (Chicago, USA) and Steven Austad (Moscow, Idaho, USA) pointing towards the intrinsic limitations owing to the body design, and social and political obstacles to life extension. Even the dreamers, for example Jerry Lemler (Scottsdale, USA) who believes in the possibilities of medical time travel through cryopreservation were given the platform to present their views, which sounded far-fetched, unscientific and even crazy to main-stream scientists. Aubrey himself could afford to imagine and speculate in any direction he wanted, because he did not feel restrained by any experience and training in the realities of actually doing the biogerontological research.

Most of the scientific presentations were limited to short talks and posters, some of which presented new and old descriptive data in biogerontology, but most others had made special efforts to analyze their studies in the context of the general theme of the meeting as exploring the possibilities of gerontological intervention, prevention and therapy. The main approaches developing in this respect were represented by the talks given by Michael West (Worcester, USA) on therapeutic cloning, by Clive Svendsen (Wisconsin, USA) and Nadia Rosenthal (Rome, Italy) on stem cell and gene therapy, by Roger Nitsch (Zurich, Switzerland) on immunotherapy for Alzheimer's disease, and by Calvin Harley (Meno Park, USA) and William

Haseltine (Rockville, USA) on telomerase and regenerative medicine, respectively.

Another area of the so-called anti-aging medicine in which some progress is being made is the development of antioxidant nutraceuticals and antioxidant and calorie restriction mimetics, as exemplified by the presentations of Bruce Ames (Berkeley, USA), Ed Lakatta (Baltimore, USA), Salvatore Pepe (Melbourne, Australia) and Don Ingram (Baltimore, USA). Exercise and other lifestyle modifications which are known to have beneficial effects with respect to the maintenance of health are being better understood through the mechanism of hormesis which essentially operates through stress-induced stimulation of body's own maintenance and repair pathways. Several speakers and posters implied directly or indirectly the successful application of hormesis in

aging intervention and modulation. These include the presentations by Sataro Goto (Chiba, Japan), by Li Ji (Madison, USA), by Scott Powers (Florida, USA), and by myself.

Overall, the 10th IABG Congress turned out to be an historical meeting, where new and old, conservative and radical, real and imaginary, sensible and nonsensical, optimistic and pessimistic, ethical and unethical views, notions and ideas about aging, anti-aging, longevity and immortality tried to come together and inspire or ignite each other. However, the overloaded busy schedule did not leave much time to see the results of such interactions, which may have to wait for the next IABG congress in 2005, to be organized by our team at the Danish Centre for Molecular Gerontology, University of Aarhus, Denmark. You are invited to participate.