

## Fall 2010 President's Message

Submitted by

Stefano Bonassi, IAEMS President

### Fate is Written in the Name

Time runs very quickly, and it is surprising that one year has already passed since the ICEM in Florence, when the new president and executive board have been appointed by the general assembly of IAEMS. Many things have happened during the last twelve months, and many efforts have been done to accomplish the priority tasks identified by the executive board. Despite other priorities, such as the creation of stable financial conditions ensuring the existence and the functionality of IAEMS are on the top of the list, we decided to concentrate our resources on the launch of the process which, through the choice of a new name, will bring our societies to re-define themselves and the role of our research. The IAEMS and some of its initial member societies have reached or are approaching 40 years of age, and this observation provides an opportunity to reflect on both the past successes and future opportunities of IAEMS. In particular, we should use this occasion to consider the developments in the field of environmental mutagenesis and to assess the membership of the societies, the scientific trends in our field, and possible changes that might revitalize our societies and welcome new members from new areas of science.

The idea of renovating our societies by choosing a new name has been around for several years. In these years I had endless and frustrating discussions with many members of EMSs, all of us divided between the need to choose a new name reflecting the extraordinary developments of science in the last decades, and the lack (or the excess) of suitable alternatives. The heterogeneity of the proposal was huge and apparently without solutions.

After the general assembly held August 2009 in Florence, the newly elected IAEMS Executive Board decided to appoint two highly reputed persons to ask them to get in touch with the national societies, opinion leaders in environmental sciences, and young and old EMS members, and to explore possible ideas regarding changing the name of the IAEMS-affiliated societies. We asked them at the end of this explorative phase to formulate a proposal for a new name, to be discussed within our societies. The two persons were David DeMarini and Silvio De Flora, and the result of their thorough work is published as a Commentary in the journal *Mutation Research—Reviews*.

Their conclusion was "Although various names are possible, we think that changing the name of these societies to 'Environmental Genomics Society' may help to make our societies more attractive to a broader range of scientists, resulting in an increase in membership and an acceleration of the incorporation of genomic methods into environmental research."

*"Environmental genomics seeks to predict how an organism or organisms will respond, at the genetic level, to changes in their external environment. These genome responses are diverse and, as a result, environmental genomics must integrate molecular biology, physiology, toxicology, ecology, systems biology, epidemiology, and population genetics into an interdisciplinary research program.*

*Environmental genomics is a generic term that applies to all studies examining the impact that environmental conditions have on gene transcription, protein levels, the stability of the genome itself, or the diversity of the genomes in a population."*—(C.C. Martin (ed.) *Environmental Genomics: Methods in Molecular Biology*, Humana Press, New York, 2008.)

The IAEMS Executive Board agreed with the critical evaluation reported in the Commentary and enthusiastically appreciated the proposal. We are now starting to gather as many comments as possible, not only from local and regional EMSs, but also and especially from single EMS members that have the possibility to express their welcome comments. The new name is initially proposed for the International Association of Environmental Mutagen Societies, but I encourage all national and regional EMS to consider this proposal, to contribute to general discussion, and also to start a similar discussion within their membership. We really need to face together this critical choice.

Please download the [Commentary](#) and post your comments in the [IAEMS blog](#) opened for this purpose. You may also obtain the Commentary through PubMed or the [Mutation Research Web site](#). In the next few months I will attend annual meetings of major regional societies where this proposal will be presented to various councils. This is a valuable opportunity for a direct discussion, and I encourage all of you to contribute.

Such a big change can be managed positively only if there is a large participation from all EMS members. I look forward to your comments.

**Stefano Bonassi, Ph.D.**

*President, IAEMS*