

LYMPHOLOGY MILESTONE COMING IN 2025-26: 60-YEAR LYMPHOLOGY TRIFECTA TO COMMEMORATE FOUNDING OF THE DISCIPLINE OF LYMPHOLOGY AND THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY OF LYMPHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

2025-26 marks 60 years since the founding of the discipline of Lymphology. Landmarks in the history of the discipline are chronicled highlighting seminal contributions of ISL members. As we look back to celebrate and commemorate our history and the explosive growth of the field, a trifecta of international conferences, all significantly contributed to by the ISL, are planned as we simultaneously look forward to the bright future of the ISL and the discipline of Lymphology.

Keywords: Lymphology, International Society, ISL, history, landmarks, 60-year commemoration

History

60 years ago, in Davos, Switzerland (yes, the same place where billionaires now meet annually for the World Economic Forum), informal discussions were held between bored radiologist-lymphographers Alois Ruttimann of the University of Zurich and Manuel Viamonte of the University of Miami about the remarkable, dynamic, images of the living human lymphatic system being revealed by oily contrast direct lymphography (1,2). Following these discussions, an initial meeting of

basic scientists and physicians exploring the newly rediscovered lymphatic system was held in December 1965 in New Orleans, Louisiana. This ground-breaking meeting was organized by physiologist Hyman Mayerson of Tulane University and the Ochsner Clinic (3). There, a gathering of international, multidisciplinary, and multi-specialty collection of speakers - many of whom had never met but shared one common interest - came together to discuss the lymphatic system in health and disease. Furthermore, publications and textbooks from Hungary and Australia were included (4-6). These pioneers foresaw a transdisciplinary, but distinct, discipline encompassing lymphatic vessels, lymph, lymph nodes and lymphocytes - that crystallized a few months later into "Lymphology." Formal plans were made for an International Congress of Lymphology to be held in Zurich in July 1966 and the formation of a society dedicated to the new discipline forging anatomy, physiology, immunology, radiology, surgery, and clinical medicine (Figs. 1,2) (7).

In the intervening years, 29 International Congresses (Fig. 3), presided over by 29 ISL Presidents (Fig. 4), of Lymphology have been held in 6 continents, attracting lymphologists from many different specialties and hundreds of nations (Fig. 5). The field has grown exponentially, with many regional chapters,



Fig. 1. Foundation of the International Society of Lymphology (ISL), 1966 - identified courtesy of Brigit Laubli, first Secretary of the ISL. **Back row:** J.R. Casley-Smith, H. Mislin, M. Schamaun, M. Wiljasalo, F. Heinzl, W. Wirth, J. Collette. **Middle row:** M. Viamonte, A. Belan, L. Popovic, J. Gruwez, O. Ishida, C. Chavez, R. Koehler, A. Rüttimann, S.A. Threefoot, M. Földi, W. Gerteis, A. Engeset, S. Kubik, A. Kammerer. **Front row:** P. Malek, B. Shaffer, W.A. Fuchs, H. Fisher, J. Kinmonth, S. Godart, B. Tjernberg, B. Laubli.

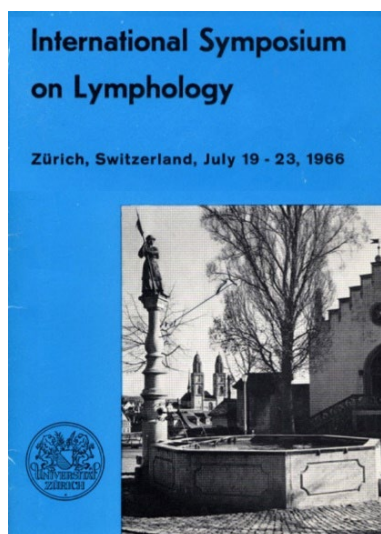


Fig. 2. Conference Booklet from the first International Congress of Lymphology, 1966.

advocacy organizations, and specialty groups expanding the audience as the impact of lymphatic disorders on hundreds of millions around the globe has come to be recognized. From molecular lymphology to field work in tropical endemic regions, the scope of the field has paralleled advances in medicine and surgery and some even at the forefront (Fig. 6)(8). The *Journal Lymphology*, now in its soon to be 58th year of publication (since 1968), is now joined by many new journals focused on various aspects of lymphology and particularly the most common malformation complication, lymphedema. Periodic Consensus documents are promulgated by the ISL, most recently updated in 2023 representing the authoritative guidelines for diagnosis and treatment of peripheral lymphedema (9). The earliest papers on lymphatic endothelial isolation, molecular lymphology, lymphangio-



Fig. 3. Worldwide locations of the 30 International Congress of Lymphology. Not depicted are many more affiliated international, national, and regional courses, symposia, task forces, meetings from ISL members in 42 nations.



Fig. 4. Photographs of ISL Presidents (listed along the bottom) and other influential clinicians and scientists from the start of the ISL in 1965 to present.



Fig. 5. International Congress of Lymphology have been held all around the world. Pictured here is the 5th ICL held in 1975 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Fig. 6. Progress in Lymphology is summarized as a chronology from 1627, where lymphologists and the ISL have been the pioneers leading the way to development and relevance of the discipline.

genesis, lymphatic malformations were featured there and in ISL Congresses for their first time. Most recently, the largest study of genotype-phenotype correlations in multimodal lymphatic imaging (a frequent subject in primary lymphedema) was published (10), along with (in this issue) a chromosomal map as a template for discovery of new genes associated with lymphatics system (11), along with a point-counterpoint on the Biobridge™ lymphatic transplantation technique, and multiple technical papers on advances in lymphatic microsurgery (12-15). The publications build on the seminal text published at the time *Lymphology* was founded, those published since adding the expanding number of books and chapters published by authors from and outside the ISL, including in textbooks of other specialties (e.g. vascular surgery, cancer metastasis) (16-18).

Upcoming International Conferences

The Trifecta of conferences, featuring lymphology and co-organized with members of the ISL, include the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Central Lymphatic System in health and disease, September 18-20 in Philadelphia; the 30th World Congress of Lymphology in Antalya Turkey, October 15-19, and the Cancer Metastasis through the Lymphovascular System (10th International) in San Francisco, October 30 and 31. The 3 conferences will span the breadth of lymphology, focusing on the central pathways of lymph drainage, general lymphology, and the oldest theme, i.e. cancer metastasis through the lymphatic system while exploring ever-expanding themes such as imaging, genetics, molecular lymphology, and advances in both conventional and surgical treatments.

Looking Forward (and Back)

Embryologist Otto Kampmeier, in his seminal text on ontogeny and phylogeny of the lymphatic system (19), remarked that over his long life the lymphatic system had not lost its fascination for him. We can echo his sentiment, for those who have worked in the field,

old and new alike – that this fascination with this system has not diminished - with what we don't know far surpassing what has been discovered and reflecting a broad theme of medical ignorance recognized by the ISL in its journal - what we know we don't know, don't know we don't know (discovery/surprises) and think we know but don't (error) (20). Our fascination is matched by the challenges to bring advances in lymphology to the bedside and clinic with greater understanding and new avenues of treatment for these disabling and life-threatening disorders. These challenges will reverberate in the trifecta of 2025-26 conferences in lymphology (21-25).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare that no financial conflict of interest exist.

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