

Editorial

World Allergy Organization Congress – Allergy in a Changing World

The World Allergy Organization in collaboration with the European Academy of Allergology and Clinical Immunology organized an outstanding meeting in Munich (26 Jun–1 Jul). The theme of the meeting was 'Allergy in a changing world'. However, it was very apparent from the sessions that much focus was on prediction and prevention. It was very gratifying to see that pediatric allergology held a high profile within the meeting.

It is remarkable that simultaneously there have been pediatricians as presidents of the European Academy, the American Academy and the World Allergy Organization. This has led to a remarkable convergence of enterprise in allergy worldwide. It is particularly appropriate that one of the first outputs from the World Allergy Organization has been an outstanding report on prevention of allergy and allergic asthma (1), which will set the scene for research over the next decade. This has always been one of the main focuses of *Pediatric Allergy and Immunology*.

The World Allergy Congress itself was the best attended international allergy meeting ever. Both plenary and free communication sessions were outstanding and the vast majority were extremely well attended. Indeed, the pediatric sessions that I attended were in packed lecture halls. There were many highlights. One outstanding lecture in particular, 'Dendritic cell – T cell interaction' by Ulrich van Andrian, had the audience dumbstruck with amazement. He showed video images of real time interactions between dendritic cells and T cells and then T cells and B cells within lymphnodes. We have, of course, always had an impression of immune cells moving, developing contact and interacting, but to actually visualise this was truly remarkable.

From my perspective, the most outstanding free communication came from Oslo, Norway. The Carlsens have overseen a truly remarkable birth cohort study which is now conducting its 10-year follow-up. They have demonstrated that there are differences in lung function at birth which predict asthma at 10 years of age. This

evidence very much accords with my prejudice about the early life origins of asthma. This truly focuses attention on airway development *in utero* and how this is affected by antenatal gene environment interactions, thereby conferring susceptibility to asthma. This is clearly independent of atopic status, and it is only when atopy and lung dysmorphology coincide that asthma occurs. Whether or not this is a consequence of fetal or maternal genotype will require detailed investigation. We recently published a paper on the influence of maternal glutathione S-transferase genotype as having a specific influence on the lung function of the offspring, irrespective of whether the child had the same genotype (2). One could speculate that maternal exposure to pollutants in the presence of a polymorphism in genes have an effect on antioxidant systems will have an impact on the fetus and could conceivably affect lung growth and development. This intriguing set of interactions has not hitherto been submitted to detailed investigation.

Overall, the message from the meeting was that remarkable progress is being made in understanding the basic mechanisms leading to the development of allergy and allergic disease. However, the challenge of the next decade is to identify efficacious interventions to prevent the onset of allergy and/or its progression to disease.

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References

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2. CARROLL WD, LENNEY W, CHILD F, et al. Maternal Glutathione S-transferase GSTP1 genotype is a specific predictor of phenotype in children with asthma. *Pediatr Allergy Immunol* 2005; 16: 32–69.