

**Dr S.Mitchell Lewis: Presentation at the ICSH General Assembly
Gerrards Cross, UK, 7th Oct, 2013**

First of all, thank you very much for the invitation.

It began as a misunderstanding, the invitation I received was to give a talk or say something at the meeting which I thought was going to be of two or three hundred haematologists from England, from the UK. I was delighted when I found that it wasn't a meeting of three hundred haematologists from the United Kingdom, but rather old friends of ICSH from around Europe and also America. So the things I was chatting about might become at some stage, slightly limited to the UK, please forgive me for that.

It all began really in 1960, gosh, that was a long time ago, more than 60 years ago, when the College of American Pathologists established a national proficiency testing program for all laboratories in the USA. In 1962, the United Kingdom Department of Health Committee on Laboratory Practice, established with Tom Whitehead, a well-known clinical chemist and some of you may know his name. Tom Whitehead was invited by the UK Department of Health to become chairman of an advisory committee on laboratory methods and equipment, and it was emphasized that was only the start in the UK, there was a need for quality control procedures in all chemistry laboratories and if successful, this should be followed by a similar group working on haematology. It took a few months for this to be established and in 1963, I was working at Hammersmith under what was then Professor J.V.Dacie, and he was invited to a meeting to discuss this formation of the committee. He thought what a waste of time that would be, who wants that sort of committee and so he picked on me as a young member of his department to go instead, and that allowed me to go to a conference in Stockholm where there was a discussion on this subject. This was the 10th Congress of international Society of Hematology and ICSH was recognized as an organization at that society meeting and a council or a committee of the European Society of Hematology was established. We first met in Lisbon a year later in 1963 and the standardization committee was established for the blood counts and I was invited to become a member of that committee. The following year in 1964, the European committee was invited to attend a Congress of the International Society of Hematology. This was the 10th International Congress of Hematology and at that meeting ICSH was recognized as an official committee, later to become the council of the society with named representatives from various countries. Professor Heilmeyer from Germany became the president. Dr. Jip Spaander, became the Chairman of the Secretariat, he was the important representative of the Dutch government as he was Director of the Dutch Institute for Public Health. Then I became the secretary; I was the only fluently speaking English person on the committee at that stage, they all became fluent afterwards. Heilmeyer as the President and Spaander as the Chairman of the Secretariat, invited me to become the Secretary and this became a partnership which lasted for many, many years. Regular secretariat meetings took place every three or four months in Bilthoven under Dr. Spaander's institution and I must say they were very sophisticated because he had a full-time chauffeur or driver who drove me

around everywhere, met me at the airport and that was luxury in those days. Eventually Spaander retired and the Council unanimously appointed me to take over the role of Chairman of the committee. The other people who we met at that time, were (*inaudible*), who was a microbiologist interested in the affairs of haematology, Spaander... he was a friend of Spaander's and he willingly came to this new ICSH. In the first meeting in 1967 the year after that, make sure I have got the right dates. No sorry, in 1966 before that, the 11th Congress of the International Society in Sydney which I think none of you is old enough, other than me, to remember that congress, there was a symposium on automation in haematology. Subsequently this was published as a supplement of the British Journal of Haematology, volume 13 in April, 1967. This included a report of a study on the established panels of haemoglobinometry which was perhaps the main panel at that stage, and this was a paper presented by van Kampen and Zijlstra with Holtz, who was the panel secretary at that time, on the proposed ICSH hemoglobin standard. This symposium also included papers by J.W. Stewart on the use of electronic blood cell counters in haematology and by Russell Eilers on the impact of automation on haematology and its staff. And ICSH are a result of that meeting, set up recommendations for a haemoglobin standard and that was really the first standard produced by ICSH. It then expanded its committee and from the USA, we had Eilers, Crosby and Koepke, from Italy, (*inaudible*), from Belgium, Verwilghen, Israel, Izak, and from Japan, Miwa and Watanabe, it had become obviously quite international. In the UK, NEQAS was expanding as a formal health body with support and control by the government Department of Health, to which it would report at regular meetings. In fact the British government thought this an official organization of their standing and they would not countenance any interference by academicians alone. In 1969, I, with my assistant Brian Burgess, published in the British Medical Journal, a report of UK haemoglobin trials which we were carrying out and in 1970, the Royal College of Pathologists, after lengthy board discussions, agreed to support NEQAS and BCSH as an appropriate professional authority, so we were rapidly trying to ensure that we were taken out of the government and into the profession and the British Society for Haematology (BSH) was identified as the appropriate organizers of the British Committee for Standards in Haematology. At the seventh meeting of the British Society of Haematology, in 1966, The British Committee for Standards in Haematology was recognized as a committee of the BSH. No funding was provided. I searched around and I managed to get a grant from the Wellcome Foundation to launch the scheme at Hammersmith hospital, with one technician. Accommodation was a small laboratory adjacent to my office on the 4th floor of the Commonwealth building in Hammersmith and Brian Burgess accepted the post and we had many years of collaboration together as the quality assessment scheme. By 1970 we were able to expand when WHO established us as a collaborating Center for Haematology with David Roper and other members of staff of the Royal College of Pathologists, RCPATH, and the medical school. We become closely involved with the representatives of the commercial companies of that time, we were undertaking manufacture of haemoglobin reference preparations and other standards. The high quality and reliability of the products came from this collaboration. We are now in 1970, meanwhile ICSH was also expanding its range of topics requiring standardization so after haemoglobin, ICSH began expanding into different areas. The participants were established experts from all countries and I am reassured that many of those, including their chairman and councillors and many of the essential experimental studies were undertaken in

the UK as well. So the UK set up a central body to study quality control and standardization. Subsequently these standards were manufactured commercially by commercial companies and checked by ICSH experts before becoming available to laboratories. At that stage, ICSH was primarily formed to ensure the reliability of haemoglobinometry and then the blood count in general, but it expanded over the next three or four years and by the end of that era, ICSH had panels on haemoglobinometry, blood collection procedures, cytochemistry, vitamin B12 and folate, iron and ferritin, radioisotope methods for diagnosis and therapy, red cell enzymes, haemoglobinopathies, staining methods, classification of leukemias, ESR and rheology, blood transfusion serology and then most recently, spleen function. So this was a pretty hefty group of organizations with experts around the world.

Now, my misunderstanding of today's meeting was I thought it was a meeting of British haematologists, so you will forgive me if I now concentrate on the British people at this stage because the participation of the UK was in virtually every panel, especially leukemias, B12 and folate, blood transfusion serology, radioisotope methods for diagnosis, and blood coagulation. I will refer to some of their names, many of whom I am sure, are all-too-familiar to all of you, mainly from Hammersmith. Leukemia was David Galton, Dan Catovsky and Estella Matutes, who we claim to be British, although Spaniards around here would object. Vitamin B12 and folate was David Mollin, Victor Hoffbrand and Dan Catovsky, another ex-Latin American who became British; iron, Jack Fielding and blood transfusion, Pat Mollison and Sheila Worledge. Hemoglobin became a very important panel of course, with John England, J.C.White, Huntsman, Crossland-Taylor, Herman Lehmann, Huntsman, Luzzatto and Cavill. Please forgive that they are all British, but they really dominated the field of haemoglobinometry. Radioisotopes was also tended to be British with Leon Szur, Harold Glass and I was also personally involved with that. Red cell chemistry, we had Luzzatto, Lehmann and Bentley. Coagulation, Ingram, Poller and Hills, blood films - Marshall, and Bentley, both of whom escaped to America in due course, and myself. Cytometry, we got very generous sponsors for cytometry panel and I don't have to tell you that they were mainly, at that stage, Coulter who supported ICSH from 1958 and later on, Toa, then Sysmex from 1963 and they really could be accounted for the main factors in the major activities which the cytometry panel carried out over the next few years. However, we also met with Brian Davis in 1989 for a meeting on technical innovations in laboratory haematology. This led to the foundation of ISLH in 1999 and the creation of IJLH a year or two later, so this really were where we begin our activities here. Once, previous ICSH documents were published in the British Journal of Haematology, but the International Journal of Laboratory Hematology became the appropriate journal for future ICSH technical publications. This journal, now in its volume 33, is internationally recognized as a leading international journal and has taken over from the traditional British Journal of Haematology for all matters involving both laboratory technology and practical technology in our trade. It was very difficult to separate national and international activities, as they relate and encompass each other so closely and it was my pleasure that I left ICSH in the hands of such competent people as Sam Machin and Carol Briggs, and they have become the chairman of BCSH and secretary respectively. We emphasized from the very start that NEQAS and EQAS were not government authorities and that the governmental authority was not a big brother to look after them and that we were independent organizations associated with our profession

and it was intended as an educational advisor and not as a legal authority. We were able to respond once again to all queries relating to laboratory technology, and in spite of one angry letter which I got from consultant haematologist who was not prepared to give up his independent professional activities for an anonymous bureaucratic authority which was us. At each stage of this organization we were associated also with the World Health Organization. They founded a laboratory on haemoglobinometry at Hammersmith and they extended that to many other experts around the UK and the USA, etc. So I think that we can claim that we stimulated the WHO to link with a profession rather than governmental authorities. Whenever we came to meetings, we emphasized we were a professional body and not an authoritative law-giving body.

ICSH has expanded enormously and I am delighted to see here today many old friends, and at the same time the younger generation coming and that ICSH is not likely to disappear into the realms of either theory, philosophy, or government. This is a very brief sketch of how it all began and I am very happy now to talk about specific activities which took place. If anybody would like to talk about it and ask questions, I'm here to talk about ICSH up to, gosh, 20 years ago? When was I retired? Well, I actually defied the authorities because I really only retired three years ago, when I was 86.

Question from the audience:

Q: There is representation from at least a half a dozen commercial operations, vendors. Can you talk about the relationship and the history of the relationship with commercial companies with the committee.

Dr Lewis: It all began with the early meetings in the states and the meetings in Canada. We obviously needed commercial help to organize meetings, etc., and Wallace Coulter was our first association friend and he was a very generous friend. Many of our meetings took place under Wallace's guidance in parts of America mainly, and he also supported meetings in Canada. One of my memories of Wallace was not his superior activities in the world of salesmanship and haematology, but on sailing his boat up and down the harbour and he had a very bright idea once, he actually became a member of the expert panel on cell counting and he had a bright idea he supported, we looked to the commercial companies to support our activities obviously and he decided instead of paying for us to go to Miami and stay in a hotel and he had a brilliant idea of putting us on a boat and the boat would sail around that part of the world for about 8 day tour and this was much cheaper for him than going to a hotel in Miami and we had a lovely enjoyable time, fortunately it had a lot of other passengers; the passengers were divided into two groups, the gamblers, who came for gambling, and us. The captain decided that he didn't need his office suite and he gave it to us as a present for the duration of the journey and so we had six days of discussing blood cell counting under ideal conditions. Most of us had wives with us who sat on deck and enjoyed the sunshine while we sat in the captain's cabin and it was a very fruitful meeting. Wallace was very wise to do that and we were a confined group for a week with no other distractions. We had a large number of meetings in the various other parts

of the states and also in Canada where we were royally entertained; we had good friends there, and we met in Lake Louise which was a very lovely place, we could take afternoons off and go for long walks and the mornings were spent in serious discussions and that was I think the right way to set about these meetings. You can't talk business for 10 hours a day, 5 hours at the most, 6 hours, and at least you can have both good food and good entertainment thereafter. I think we set the scene for all further future ICSH activities

Q: The bank accounts was set up in a private bank in Groningen in Holland. All I know about Groningen it is a long way from Amsterdam. Can you briefly tell us why they used a private bank and not an international bank and why they chose that particular bank in Groningen?

Dr Lewis: The first thing we did was to appoint a treasurer, as you know, in ICSH and one of the reasons to appoint a treasurer, was that neither I nor Jip Spaander had anything to do with the money. Spaander was quite rich because he was the Director of the institute and had his chauffeured driven car and his suite of rooms so did not need money and I did not need money because he was paying for my trips, so we were not interested in the money side of it. So Hans was appointed as the treasurer and he came from Groningen and this is why the bank was set up there. All I know is that there was always enough money for the meetings and I never inquired how it came about. I do know that this generosity, Coulter originally were very generous to us supporting our meetings and Toa Sysmex followed afterwards.

If I could just finish the point. Coulter became interested in ICSH, he attended all the meetings and when we were in Lake Louise, we used to go on motor tours, and he enjoyed being with us on the tour and we would talk half business and half scenery. And that is a pretty healthy way of getting both the academic and the business part of ICSH linked together and eventually the Toa Sysmex people came in with us as well and one of my great pleasures and I'm very proud that I was able to bring together Wallace Coulter and the people from Sysmex together and we would sit them together side-by-side in coaches and we would go sightseeing and they got to know as friends not just as business rivals which they originally were. In later life, one of the advantages of Sysmex, is the organizers of Sysmex were a bit younger than Wallace Coulter and I do remember one of our meetings in America in Florida. Wallace Coulter had supported the meeting and he had encourage me to come with my wife Ethel as well and this was a cytology panel meeting we had to go to our meeting at 9 a.m. sharp, leaving behind in the hotel dining room, Ethel with Wallace Coulter. Wallace was not going to spend his time at meetings, he was far too old to spend his time at meetings, he said, he much preferred having breakfast with Ethel and he joined the meeting at 11 p.m. which was coffee time. Wallace began to enjoy life in later years and he was such a charming person.

S.Mitchell Lewis, 7th Oct 2013

Transcribed by Gini Bourner, Szu-Hee Lee and Adrian Stephens, ICSH.