

# ISN Forefronts in Nephrology 1986–2006

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This year marks the twentieth anniversary of a program that has contributed significantly to the advancement of scientific research in nephrology: the Forefronts in Nephrology program. This program was initiated in 1986, a time when research in nephrology was in transition. Previously, renal research had been conducted in isolation from research in other disciplines. Dominated by measures and techniques such as renal clearance, micro-puncture and tubular microperfusion, there were few points of crossover between renal researchers and cell biologists or biochemists; opportunities for interaction between these groups were rare.

This dearth of interdisciplinarity was overcome in the 1980s and 1990s following the realization that, like other organs, the kidney is composed of cells and molecules, and that questions posed and techniques used in other disciplines could be applied to renal research. In this setting, the leadership of the International Society of Nephrology (ISN) determined that it would be greatly beneficial to bring together small groups of renal investigators and leading researchers from other disciplines. These conferences were not to be focused on reviewing advances of the past, but rather aimed to identify areas in which renal science should be progressing, and to define and catalyze the advancement of the forefront of kidney research.

The first conference, held in Pinehurst, North Carolina, was entitled 'Molecular Biology of the Kidney' and was a huge success. This meeting helped to introduce many renal researchers—both the young and the more established—to the elegance and utility of molecular and cell biology, and highlighted the potential for the application of these tools in kidney research.

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#### Competing interests

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There have been many subsequent Forefronts in Nephrology symposia of similar quality and consequence. Conferences have generally addressed basic science topics and provided in-depth coverage of a topic with limited scope. Participants have been active scientists, ideally with nephrology and non-nephrology attendees in equal numbers. Venues have been generally in pleasant isolated locations so that participant interaction is maximized, and locations have varied. Most meetings have been held in the US and Europe, with a few taking place in Asia. The key consideration when choosing a location has always been attracting the investigators who will contribute most to advancement of scientific research in the discipline. Summaries of Forefronts meetings have been published in *Kidney International*—an official publication of the ISN—to familiarize the broader ISN membership with advances in the key areas of science covered.

Since the inception of the Forefronts program, the ISN has held one or two symposia per year, spanning all aspects of basic research in nephrology. Other societies within and outside nephrology have initiated similar programs, but few have the traditions and record of success that characterize Forefronts in Nephrology. As the major international nephrology organization, the ISN has a wide range of activities; Forefronts is the prime representation of the Society's investment in ensuring that basic research will advance our understanding and treatment of renal disease throughout the world. The ISN Executive Committee recently re-affirmed its commitment to the program. Personally, we have been delighted to be entrusted with responsibility for the Forefronts in Nephrology over the years, and are extremely proud of all that the program has accomplished.