



The Editor's Column

By the President of the IFCC and Laboratory Medicine

Professor Mathias Müller

To the members of the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine

As the world enters the new Millennium, visions, strategies are being discussed, questioned, and reconsidered all over the world. The pertinent questions are: (1) What will be the future? (2) Where will our profession go? (3) What will be the status of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine in the changing health care system? (4) What will be the status and the contribution of this Federation to the new challenges? Serious answers to these questions must be based on evaluating achievements, extrapolating recent developments, and defining objectives for the future. Despite the wish of reaching all identified goals within a reasonable time, uncertainty remains a fundamental principle of the human experience. The International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (IFCC) was founded in 1952. It is a professional organisation with the general aim to advance the theory, science, practice, education, and training of clinical and diagnostic laboratories. The Federation provides world-wide leadership for the benefit of its membership by collaborating and supporting national professional societies, regional organisations, the diagnostic industry, and governmental and non-governmental agencies.

With the implementation of the strategic plan six years ago, the IFCC Executive Board has since managed the affairs of the Federation using the objectives and aims defined in this plan. In addition to starting several new programmes and projects, the most obvious consequence of the implementation of the strategic plan was the name change to the International Federation of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine of the Federation. This was done to simultaneously extend the Federation's activities to more medical service for the benefit of the patients and to maintain its scientific credibility. The challenge for the new Executive Board will be to follow this direction and to expand IFCC's role in order to serve the public interest in health care. The credibility and value of this Federation lies with the achievements made by the Divisions and their respective working parties. Some of these are not yet obvious for the public, but must be considered as investments made for the future.

Scientific Division

The SD (Chair: J.-C. FOREST) in collaboration with various international organisations (IRMM, ISO, ISTM, IUPAC, NIBSC, NCCLS, WHO, etc.) is focusing on standardisation projects such as new reference measurement procedures and reference materials applying sound metrological rules. All these activities are and will be continuously evaluated with respect to their clinical implications.

Education and Management Division

The EMD (Chair: G. SANDERS) has been traditionally involved in training, education, and quality

assurance programmes. It has now expanded its activities to include projects related to diagnostic strategies, to outcome studies, and laboratory management issues such as accreditation. Several of these new activities are being carried-out in close collaboration with the national societies, regions, industry, and other professional organisations.

Communication and Publications Division

The CPD (Chair: B. GOUGET) had accepted the challenge of electronic communication and established the IFCC Web Site. With this new technology, IFCC will reach all colleagues world-wide and will be able to better serve them. The electronic version of the IFCC Journal publishes review articles, news, and reports from IFCC working parties and programmes. A new relationship with the Journal of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine (CCLM) has been established with "IFCC pages" being included in issues of the Journal. These IFCC pages will include recommendations and news of the Federation. Such information will be available in both the hard-copy and electronic versions of the Journal.

Congress and Conference Division

The CCD (Chair: G. BEASTALL) has established various guidelines and regulations for running efficiently congresses and conferences. It is the intention of the Executive Board that this Division will be more involved in the organisation and running of specialised Conferences and Congresses.

Predicting the future development of this Federation is a difficult task. The Federation is a voluntary organisation depends not only on financial resources but also on individuals ready to serve this organisation. In addition to the future directions of IFCC Divisions mentioned above, future key activities for the Federation include:

- Active participation of world experts recruited from our membership.
- Close collaboration with regional, national professional organisations, industry, and other international organisations.
- Globalisation of regional achievements, taking best regional practices into consideration - moving to the regions and countries.
- Standardisation programmes for the sake of the patients resulting in harmonisation of test results.
- Disease oriented guidelines for rationale diagnostics (algorithms) with regional input and taking economic aspects into consideration.
- Laboratory quality management and accreditation with global and regional aspects.
- Communication initiative using the IFCC web-site for individual participation in IFCC and usage of IFCC products

These points are my expectations and visions of the future of the Federation. I believe that we will meet our goals and expectations by involving the world-wide network of clinical chemists, clinical biochemists, and laboratory physicians in the activities of the Federation. With the changing economy, health care systems, and globalisation of industry and services, pressure is building on individuals in our profession. Some of the programmes and activities of IFCC envisaged are related to these changes and will be directed to run clinical laboratories more efficiently at a high standard of professional and technical competence for the benefit and interest of patients and for society. Besides using new technologies and providing accurate measurements, interpretation of test results, decisions on a diagnosis, prognosis, and the treatment of a patient will be a new task. We should accept this challenge and the responsibility and thus become a partner to the clinicians. Therefore the traditional professional competence and skills of the staff working in diagnostic laboratories must be adapted by continuous education in order to implement the vision of Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine as a bridge from basic, applied science to clinical service. Following two extraordinary, efficient and visionary IFCC Presidents - Professors Gerard SIEST and Matthew McQUEEN - is a honour, a pleasure, but also a tremendous challenge. I look forward to working with the new Executive Board, Divisions members, and with all of you to meet the goals of our Federation and to advance healthcare world-wide.

On behalf of all IFCC officers I wish you and your co-workers a successful and happy new Millennium,

Yours sincerely,
Mathias M. Müller