Responding to the progress in hepatology: beyond the boundaries

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The American Association for the Study of Liver Disease (AASLD) founded in 1950, and subsequently the International Association for the Study of the Liver (IASL) in 1958 and the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) in 1966 led to the growth and development of “Hepatology”. Along this trend, the Asian-Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver (APASL) was founded in 1978 and held its first biennial meeting in 1980. More and more clinicians and basic scientists were attracted to this field resulting in a tremendous progress in the field of hepatology. The number of so called ‘Hepatologists’ also grew and today “Hepatology” is accepted as an established distinct specialty out of the broad discipline of “Gastroenterology”.

The rapid pace of growth in hepatology was spurred and maintained by an increasing number of high quality scientific communications. To give space and recognition to these, several hepatology-specific journals came to the stage since early 1980s under the auspices of their respective liver associations. These prestigious journals in turn have made a great impact in spearheading the research and practice of hepatology. APASL did not have its own official journal but

had co-adopted Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology with Asian-Pacific Association of Gastroenterology since 1986.

In the past 3 decades, APASL has grown steadily and to an extent that some Asian countries even have separate and different training programs for hepatologists and gastroenterologists. Hepatologists in the Asian-Pacific region not only have the greatest number of patients with chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection, 75% of those in the world, but also the HBV related issues are somewhat different from other regions of the world. Chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection and hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) are also major concerns. Of course, hepatitis A and E are endemic in some countries of the region, and pose threat to the public health system. In addition, along with increasingly westernized life style, liver problems originally only prevalent in western countries, including alcoholic and nonalcoholic fatty liver diseases (NAFLD), are also increasing in this region [1]. The APASL members and Asian experts, in addition, are increasingly contributing to important research and clinical trials at the regional and international levels [2–5]. It is noteworthy that major strategies for the prevention and treatment of HBV related liver diseases were implemented initially in Asia. For example, program of universal HBV vaccination at birth and its efficacy in reducing chronic HBV infection as well as prevention of HCC were first reported from Taiwan [3, 5]. The first trial of interferon therapy in acute HCV infection was also conducted and reported from Japan [2].

The growth of APASL is best indicated by the increasing number of abstracts and attendees at its

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meetings. Responding to the growing demand, the APASL meeting has become an annual affair since 2005. In addition, single topic conferences are being organized or planned under the auspices of APASL and will be held in different member countries. A tribute to the growing stature of the APASL can be gauged by the fact that more than 1,500 abstracts were submitted from all over the world to the forthcoming Kyoto meeting, as shown in the abstract section of this issue of *Hepatology International* [6]. This may reflect not only the region's research activity and enthusiasm, but also the real international flavor of the APASL meetings.

As mentioned earlier, the number of patients with chronic liver diseases may be increasing despite the fact that chronic HBV infection is decreasing due to implement of mass HBV vaccination in more than 180 countries now. On the other hand, a large number of immigrants from Asian countries have changed the landscape of liver disease in Western countries. HBV related liver diseases and HCC have now become more and more important in the United States and Europe, and become global challenges [1]. Compared with the year 1991, studies and papers in the field of hepatology have increased 5–10 folds, in which APASL members have played an increasing role. These are well reflected in the increasing number of abstracts from all over the world submitted to the APASL annual meetings. With these, the council of the APASL has recognized the need and therefore decided to launch its own official journal, '*Hepatology International*'. The goal is not merely to have an official organ of the association, but to provide a platform for international exchange of both clinical and basic scientific information. The gold

standard of the journal would be an honest dedication to the science of liver and biliary diseases, not just a regional need. Manuscripts from the region as well as all other geographical areas would be equally welcome and will be judged solely on their scientific merit. Hopefully, the establishment of this Journal will follow the steps of the official journals of other liver associations to foster better research in hepatology and thereby enhance the practice of hepatology and care of the patients with liver or biliary diseases. The editors and the members of the editorial board sincerely invite your contributions, clinical or basic or translational research work, to make *Hepatology International*, a truly prestigious international journal.

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