Connect with AABB and colleagues near and far at the field’s preeminent meeting

Highlights of the 2021 AABB Virtual Annual Meeting include:

- Exceptional education program
- New Fundamentals of Transfusion Medicine track
- Access to more than 75 CE and/or CME credits until November 19
- Spanish subtitle translations for the majority of live programming (¡Traducciones de subtítulos en español para la mayoría de la programación en vivo!)
- Hundreds of oral and poster abstracts on the latest science in the field
- Convenient Sunday-Tuesday live schedule
- Affordable pricing for full-access registration
- And much more!

aabb.org/annualmeeting

*Continuing Medical Education (CME) activities have been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the joint providership of CME Outfitters, LLC, and AABB. CME Outfitters, LLC, is accredited by ACCME to provide continuing medical education for physicians.
8 Dreams of Expansion
Successful approaches to hematopoietic stem cell expansion could widen the availability of this life-saving treatment.

14 “The Man With the Golden Arm” and the Researchers who Saved Millions of Lives
A new book, Good Blood, details the backstory and breakthroughs that led to a treatment for Rh disease.
Collaboration is Essential to Ensure Patients’ Needs are Met

This summer, as the United States continues to make progress against the COVID-19 pandemic and some aspects of life are returning to normal, the blood community finds itself in a challenging situation once again. The summer months are often a tricky time for blood collection, but the blood supply’s precarious situation this season is beyond what many of us have previously experienced. The supply is stretched thin and many in the field are concerned about ensuring that blood will be available for patients when it is needed.

As we all know, the blood supply has fluctuated in unprecedented ways since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the current statistics are perhaps the most alarming since March and April of last year. Many blood collection facilities are operating on less than a one-day supply of blood. Some facilities have reported collection rates at 50% below the normal range.

As our community works to achieve stability in the blood supply, collaboration remains key. Fortunately, collaboration has always been a hallmark of the blood community. After all, AABB began because leaders in blood banking in the 1940s understood collaboration would help advance the field and improve patient and donor care.

Throughout the pandemic, our community has continued to respond heroically to maintain collections, ensure safety, optimize patient and donor care, and advance the field. This work has often been done through collaboration, as members of our community shared best practices, offered advice and insight and, at times, redirected shipments of blood to ensure patients had access to life-saving treatments. This collaborative spirit must be maintained while we weather the current challenges and work together to achieve a stable blood supply.

2021 AABB Annual Meeting

We are also in the midst of planning for the 2021 AABB Annual Meeting, which will be held virtually Oct 17-19. Registration is open and I encourage everyone to join us this year.

As always, the AABB Annual Meeting will feature top-rate education programs led by leaders of our community, as well as cutting-edge research representing science that is steering advancements in our field. For more on this year’s meeting, see the article on page 4, which includes an interview with Gay Wehrli, MD, MBA, MSEd, chair of the Annual Meeting Education Committee; and Melissa Cushing, MD, chair of the Selection of Abstracts Committee.

But perhaps the most highly anticipated aspect of this year’s Annual Meeting is that we will unveil our Association’s new name! I can’t wait to share the moment with my fellow AABB members as we begin the next chapter in our Association’s history together.

David Green, MSA
AABB President
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2021 AABB Annual Meeting: Advancing the Field Through Cutting-Edge Research and Superior Education Programs

Registration is open for the 2021 AABB Virtual Annual Meeting, to be held Oct. 17-19, and AABB’s staff and committee members are preparing for this year’s event. As the blood and biotherapies community has come to expect, the 2021 Virtual Annual Meeting will feature a robust program of education sessions led by world-renowned experts, a series of oral and poster abstract presentations covering the latest research in the field, and a virtual exhibit hall showcasing new products and services from industry partners.

This year, the Annual Meeting will also include an increased number of education and research sessions on biotherapies, and a new track focusing on the fundamentals of transfusion medicine designed specifically for our early-career colleagues. Also, for the first time, AABB is pleased to offer Spanish translation (in subtitles) for all sessions.

The meeting’s program is designed to help advance the field, promote practice-changing research and further attendees’ professional development. AABB will be hosting the event on a new state-of-the-art virtual platform, with enhanced opportunities for attendees to connect with one another.

Focus on Education and Research

At the forefront of this year’s meeting will be the education sessions and high-quality research presented—two aspects that make AABB’s Annual Meeting the preeminent event for the field. In recent years, both the AABB Annual Meeting Education Committee and the AABB Selection of Abstracts Committee have advanced their approach, ensuring improved content for the AABB Annual Meeting.

“The AABB Annual Meeting Education Committee has been on a four-year journey to elevate the AABB Annual Meeting,” said Gay Wehrli, MD, MBA, MSEd, the Committee’s chair. “We have enhanced diversity of the Committee for representation across our community spectrum of professional backgrounds, geographic location, years of experience, employers and more. We have also provided further guidance with greater accountability and expectations for submitting session proposals in the electronic platform. These efforts have led to higher quality submissions with a greater breadth of topics and speakers.”

Wehrli, who also serves as chief medical officer at University Hospitals Samaritan Medical Center in Ashland, Ohio, said many of the advancements the Committee has made in recent years have been motivated by a desire to provide a superior meeting experience for attendees and to ensure AABB is meeting attendees’ needs. “We listen to attendee feedback and strive to address these needs and requests,” said Wehrli. “For example, this year we are adding more Hot Topic and biotherapies sessions, and we are incorporating foundation topics designed for attendees that may be newer to the field.”

The AABB Selection of Abstracts Committee has also enhanced its efforts to ensure the highest quality of research in transfusion medicine and biotherapies is presented at the AABB Annual Meeting. “The Selection of Abstracts Committee first and foremost looks for high quality, innovative research that will move the field forward,” said Melissa Cushing, MD, chair of the Committee. “Whether the topic is in leadership, administrative, scientific, clinical or quality, we require sound research methodology and originality.”

Cushing, who also serves as Weill Cornell Medicine’s transfusion and cellular therapy medical director, vice chair of laboratory medicine, and director of clinical laboratories, noted that almost 500 expert reviewers carefully evaluated all abstracts that were submitted this year, selecting those deemed most important for the field.

Program Highlights of 2021

Both Wehrli and Cushing said they are looking forward to this year’s Annual Meeting and assured the community there will be many stand-out highlights of this year’s program.

“Every year, I look forward to learning something new from sessions that address topics beyond my day-
to-day activities and to expand my current knowledge on familiar topics,” said Wehrli said. “After a very challenging year, I look forward to sessions sharing the myriad lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic about inventory, donors, patient blood management, education and leadership.”

Wehrli added there are a handful of key sessions she is particularly looking forward to this year. “At the forefront is a session addressing crucial conversations about racism and social justice,” she said. “I am also excited about biotherapy-related sessions regarding cellular collections, informatic tools and curriculum development.”

Wehrli identified a few sessions that she expects will be particularly popular among attendees. “Sessions addressing the lessons learned from COVID-19 are likely to be well attended,” she said. “In addition, I expect attendees will be drawn to some of the very practical topics, including quality essentials, creating a self-assessment program, challenging apheresis consults, transfusion reactions, and optimizing progenitor cell sources for transplant.”

On the research side, Cushing said several of this year’s abstracts stuck out to her as being particularly noteworthy. “In the category of immunology, there was an interesting submission related to how complement impacts innate and adaptive immunity, and the role of complement in immunophrophylaxis. Another abstract that caught my eye is a description of a rapid platelet suspension phagocytosis assay that could improve platelet antibody diagnosis and help develop new therapeutic approaches to treat fetal and neonatal alloimmune thrombocytopenia and other conditions caused by platelet antibodies.”

Some abstracts may be of special interest to attendees because they address the changing needs of the field. In particular this year, several abstracts focus on pathogen-reduced platelets. “There were a number of timely submissions on the quality and safety of pathogen-reduced platelets, particularly noteworthy for the field because the FDA’s guidance on bacterial risk control methods must be implemented by October 2021 and pathogen-reduced platelets are one of the options to meet the requirements of the guidance,” Cushing said.

Cushing added that several studies examining infectious disease will be of interest to attendees. “There are quite a few intriguing, large studies evaluating the residual risk of viral infections, such as HIV, from different donor populations,” she said. “One study evaluated the incidence of HIV in first-time donors throughout a 12-month deferral at four large blood collectors using data on 7.1 million donations.”

In addition, the increased focus on biotherapies research is sure to draw the attention of many in the field. “There were many fascinating biotherapies-related submissions,” Cushing said. “Some of these highlights include studies evaluating multi-modal profiling of human fetal liver hematopoietic stem cells, the role of caveolae in hematopoietic stem cell function, outcomes in patients receiving CAR T cells, and much more.”

Attendees will also have the opportunity to join an interactive Q&A period at the conclusion of each of the six oral abstract sessions, the plenary session and the late-breaking abstracts session. Learning about the latest research will extend to the virtual poster hall, where more than 300 posters will be presented, including 15 that are designated as “top posters.” Those that want a curated tour will have the opportunity, for the first time at an AABB Annual Meeting, to attend an event where discussions around select posters will be facilitated by experts.

**Importance of the AABB Annual Meeting**

As always, the AABB Annual Meeting is the place for the field to come together, discuss the latest advances and challenges, and help move the field forward. As the blood and biotherapies field continues to work together to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the AABB Annual Meeting provides an important opportunity to connect with colleagues on both a personal and professional level.

“The AABB Annual Meeting is absolutely worth attending to learn about changes in the field and to interact with colleagues,” said Cushing. “There will be presentations that discuss major improvements in the field and anyone in the blood and biotherapies field will not want to miss out. Although we have all been challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic, innovation and science have progressed, nonetheless.”

Wehrli echoed these sentiments and said that thanks to the new virtual platform, there will be plenty of opportunities to meet and connect with fellow attendees – just like during an in-person Annual Meeting. “Please think about reaching out to friends and colleagues through the virtual platform,” Wehrli said. “This is a time to network, network, network! Use the platform to connect and meet at least one new person during the meeting. And, for our newest attendees, introduce yourself. This is a welcoming community with a breadth of members who are excited to meet new colleagues, serve as mentors and answer questions.”