2020 Annual Meeting: Virtually Indispensable
At Fresenius Kabi, shoulder to shoulder is how we’re solving today’s health care challenges. Even in this moment, when we all must stand a few feet further apart, we’re still working closely with blood center, medical, and pharmacy professionals. Fresenius Kabi’s advanced blood separation technologies are being used to collect convalescent plasma for today’s COVID-19 patients as well as source plasma for the research and development of tomorrow’s coronavirus therapies.

Learn more about Fresenius Kabi at caringforlife.us

* COVID-19 convalescent plasma is authorized under an FDA EUA and is not licensed or approved by the FDA. It is only authorized while circumstances justify the EUA during the COVID-19 pandemic under section 564(b)(1) of the Act, 21 U.S.C. § 360bbb-3(b)(1), unless authorization is terminated sooner.
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A Closer Look at Key Sessions From the 2020 AABB Annual Meeting

Most popular sessions addressed platelets, COVID-19, antigens and genotyping.

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The 2020 AABB Virtual Annual Meeting — our Association’s first-ever large-scale virtual event — has come and gone and I am thrilled by its success. I know that many of you, as well, are pleased with how our community came together — albeit virtually — to connect on important issues in our field and continue to advance transfusion medicine and biotherapies.

Like many things in 2020, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic forced AABB to make myriad changes to our Annual Meeting and rethink it as a virtual event. But our AABB community responded and joined us in multitudes, helping to bring the full experience of our traditional in-person Annual Meeting to the virtual setting. As always, there were plenty of top-notch education sessions on critical topics in the field, led by world-renowned experts. There was cutting-edge research, an Exhibit Hall showcasing our industry partners’ latest products and services, lively discussions, many networking opportunities — and plenty of fun. In short: many of our favorite aspects of the AABB Annual Meeting continued and thrived.

Despite the fact that we could not be together in person this year, the energy and enthusiasm among attendees was palpable. This serves as a reminder of the strength and dedication of our community. And it was fun to “see” colleagues near and far, joining us from their living rooms and home offices.

I thank the many members who helped the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting succeed. In particular, a big thank you to the AABB Selection of Abstracts Committee and the AABB Annual Meeting Education Committee, both of which helped to ensure the breadth and quality of the event’s content remained unmatched. I also thank the many members who presented research, shared their expertise in sessions, and participated in countless other ways, helping to make the event lively and informative.

This issue of AABB News highlights the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting. In the following pages, you’ll see summaries of some of the sessions, a closer look at key research and much more. This coverage may remind you of some essential content of the meeting or fill you in on some aspects you may have missed.

Serving as your president

I began my term as your new Association president at the close of the Annual Meeting. It is a true honor and privilege to serve as president of an organization that been vital to me throughout my career. I have been a proud and enthusiastic member of AABB for nearly 30 years.

Like many of you, my membership in AABB has benefited me immeasurably. AABB always helps keep me informed about the latest news for the field; its resources have helped advance business practices at my facility; and AABB’s professional development opportunities have enriched my career. Most of all, I have appreciated belonging to a dedicated community of talented people who are as passionate about the field as I am. The collaboration and camaraderie that I have experienced through AABB have been rewarding beyond measure.

I thank the many fellow AABB members I have worked with over the past 30-plus years.

I want to give extra thanks my predecessor, Dr. Beth Shaz, who led our Association through an unexpectedly tumultuous year. I know Dr. Shaz did not expect her term to be consumed with helping our community navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, but she did a masterful job leading us through this unchartered territory and I applaud her for her efforts.

In addition, I thank the AABB Board of Directors, who continue to help advance our Association as we manage the ever-evolving field of blood and biotherapies. I look forward to working with them and the AABB staff throughout the coming year.

As I reflect on the year ahead, I realize I am assuming the presidency during an unusual and challenging time. I understand that 2020 has continued on page 4
NEW! UltraCW II Automatic Cell Washer

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brought many stresses. Unfortunately, we know the COVID-19 pandemic will continue into 2021 and bring with it more professional and personal challenges.

Despite the difficulties we face, the pandemic has reminded me, once again, of the strength of our community. We have confronted the past year head on and grown stronger. The dedicated professionals of our community continue to go to extraordinary lengths and have worked tirelessly to ensure our ultimate goal of making transfusion medicine and biotherapies safe, available and effective worldwide.

New Resources

In the year ahead, AABB will continue to provide resources and assistance to help manage the challenges of the pandemic. We have new professional development opportunities in the works, new books coming soon, and much more.

Perhaps most exciting, AABB recently launched our brand-new, state-of-the-art website. If you have not seen it yet, I encourage you to visit www.aabb.org. The website features a new design with many user-friendly interfaces. We’ve added numerous resources that will be valuable to you and your businesses.

Among the many highlights of the new website is the AABB Newsfeed: an online news center for the transfusion medicine and biotherapies community. The newsfeed will provide essential news from AABB and the field, cutting-edge research, and important information from federal and international regulators. AABB will update the newsfeed each business day to ensure members always have access to the latest information. The newsfeed also features a search function that enables users to narrow news by subject area and to customize their feed to prioritize the most relevant news. I encourage you to start visiting the newsfeed regularly for the latest, need-to-know updates.

The new website contains an expanded resources section with valuable tools and information for both individual and institutional AABB members. It also includes a redesigned, easy-to-navigate AABB Store and improved integration with our peer-reviewed journal, Transfusion, allowing members to easily search and review research in current and past issues.

Looking for Feedback

I have communicated with many of you during my first few weeks as your Association president. I value these communications and encourage members to reach out to me throughout my presidency. I want to hear from you and learn more about how AABB can help you. Ours is a collaborative Association; together we can continue to advance the field and promote donor and patient safety. As AABB president, this is my top priority.
Here's to everyone's holidays being joyous and bright.
Top Posters at Annual Meeting Showcase Outstanding Research

By Claudia Cohn, MD, PhD
Chief Medical Officer

Every year I look forward to the AABB Annual Meeting. I enjoy the chance to catch up with old friends, relax with my colleagues and meet new people. I love the rituals I’ve established, which include reunion dinners, long walks around the host city and opening night at the Expo Hall. This year was different, and I missed these things — I’m sure we all did. But while sitting at home, scrolling through the schedule, I found that the most important part of the conference remained the same. I watched the plenary session, took in multiple oral abstracts and poster presentations and did a “virtual stroll” through the vendors’ exhibits. It was all good and I learned a lot. I still missed seeing my people, but hopefully that can happen next year in Anaheim! For now, I’d like to reflect back on a few of the outstanding posters that were honored by the Top Poster Award.

COVID-19 research

There were three Top Posters that described work related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus and COVID-19. Kruse et al. developed a point of care red cell agglutination assay for detecting antibodies against the virus. Although this test does not distinguish between different antibody classes, it does use methods routinely employed in clinical labs and is low cost (estimated at less than one U.S. dollar per assay). These features make the test highly useful for low resource settings and will be helpful in ascertaining disease prevalence, as well as identifying donors for convalescent plasma. A second poster, by DeSimone et al., looked at blood product usage in their New York City hospital during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the data for this poster were collected when NYC was an early hot-spot (3/1-5/2/2020), the information reported is of vital interest to hospitals with a large COVID-19 census. This group found that “Compared to the same period in 2019, there was an 18.6% and 34.8% reduction in RBC and platelet transfusions, respectively...” They also reported a transfusion rate of 3.3% (364 patients received transfused/11,041 patients admitted with COVID-19). The third pandemic-related Top Poster, by Beddard and Ngamsuntikul, reported on Antibody Titer Changes Over Time in Convalescent Plasma (CCP) Donors. Using data from 16 CCP donors with a starting titer greater than 1:80 (using laboratory developed ELISA for antibody to the S1 and RBD epitopes of the spike protein), they found that titer values decreased at a rate of 0.04/day. Based on this finding, they estimated that the average donor would not qualify for convalescent plasma donation after 32 days from initial testing. Similar findings have been reported by other groups working with different assays.

Sickle cell disease research

Two Top Posters were concerned with sickle cell disease (SCD). A group led by Shannon Kelly used genome wide association study (GWAS) to look for clinical and genetic predictors of alloimmunization in a Brazilian SCD cohort. They compared a cohort of transfused antibody negative subjects with patients transfused prophylactically with ABO/Rh/Kell matched RBCs who were then given extended phenotypically matched RBCs after their first antibody was formed. As with other studies, they found that age, gender, presence of RBC autoantibodies and transfusion burden were predictors for alloimmunization. However, they also found that frequent vaso-occlusive pain hospitalizations and presence of a coexisting auto-immune disease were also predictors for alloimmunization. In addition, they identified other genetic markers in coding and non-coding regions. A second group, led by Maria Rita Marcolino Miranda, evaluated the clinical significance of “unexpected” Rh antibodies in SCD patients who were receiving serologic
Rh-matched RBC units. An unexpected antibody is defined as an antibody produced by patients who have the corresponding antigen; these unexpected antibodies are seen in individuals with altered RH alleles that lack common RH epitopes. They found that all anti-C antibodies (produced by patients with partial C—or probably derived by variant Rh on donor RBCs) showed clinical significance, but only the anti-e produced by patients with the RHCE*ceAR variant allele was related to delayed hemolytic transfusion reactions. Thus, the clinical significance of unexpected Rh antibodies in SCD patients may vary according to the specific variant inherited or exposed.

More top research

Two other award-winning posters looked at different aspects of pathogen inactivation. The first, by Tabatadze et al., described a novel pathogen inactivation approach that could be used for whole blood and blood components. The researchers found that the reagent they call ZAP-C can inactivate high titers of blood-borne pathogens in different blood preparations without causing hemolysis or RBC damage, as assessed by in-vitro tests. As pathogen inactivation becomes a regular part of component processing, the introduction of a potential new reagent is welcome news. Their future work will focus on more detailed characterization of treated RBCs during storage and creation of a simple, easy-to-implement system for pathogen inactivation of RBC-containing blood products. The second poster, by Stramer and colleagues, asked, “Approximately how many blood donors could be retained by using Amotosalen (A)/ ultraviolet A light (UVA) pathogen reduction technology (PRT) as a replacement for vector borne agents’ deferrals and selected screening strategies?” By comparing the antibody status and pathogen loads of donors deferred for West Nile virus (WNV) or Babesia microti with the PRT log10 reduction factors, they were able to estimate how many donors could have been retained rather than deferred. They added malaria and Chagas disease deferrals into their model, reasoning that A/UVA PRT treatment would also render these donations as safe. Using this model, they concluded that “A/UVA PRT as the sole intervention provides a potential opportunity to replace donor health questions (malaria), selective antibody detection (Trypanosoma cruzi) and NAT for vector-borne pathogens (WNV and B. microti) and enables significant donor retention,” thus increasing platelet availability.

It’s worth noting that Ruchika Goel scored two Top Poster awards for abstracts addressing blood utilization: “Where Does the Blood Go? Top Diagnoses and Procedures Associated with Blood Utilization in Adult Hospitalized Patients in the United States” and “Blood Transfusion Utilization in Pediatric Gunshot Wound-Related Hospitalizations in United States.” I’ve run out of room, but I urge everyone to check out the other Top Poster winners in the September supplement to Transfusion or through the Annual Meeting On-Demand, where you can also take in an education session, available through the AABB Education Platform at education.aabb.org. You’ll be glad you did.