Highlights of the 2018 Congress

The 2018 Congress in Baltimore welcomed over 900 attendees from 26 countries, including the largest number of individual members of the Consortium attending a Congress, who shared the latest updates on integrative medicine and health. Co-sponsored by the Consortium and ISCMR, the meeting’s theme of “Collaboration in Action,” came to life over four days of the latest in research, education, clinical practice and policy.

Senator Barbara Mikulski, at age 82, opened the Congress with a “Call to Action!” After recounting her personal history with acupuncture and integrative medicine (IM), and her Congressional advocacy for an office and later a center to develop stronger research on IM at the National Institutes of Health, Senator Mikulski described efforts to include integrative medicine in the Affordable Care Act. She took the audience “behind the scenes” at the U.S Congress as she and others in the Senate discussed IM. She appealed to attendees to promote health and wellness, work with local communities with the greatest need, and continue to advance access to IM. She implored the audience to build the evidence base for IM, while also moving our focus to prioritize healthy lifestyles, disease prevention, and wellness. She spoke to the importance of the “meaning” so essential in fighting for the health of others and implored members to fight on for change, to never give up, ending her speech saying, with her small, but mighty fist in the air, “May the force be with you.” Attendees jumped to their feet, awarding her two standing ovations.

Dr. Tracy Guadet followed Senator Mikulski and called for a “Radical Redesign of Healthcare!” This redesign involves far more than promoting individual IM modalities. She called for a redesign that is not patient-centered, but “patient-driven,” in which the health care system is designed to empower and equip people to optimize their health and wellbeing with self-care, foster skills that focus on the patient’s own personal goals, and recognizes the importance of social and environmental factors as part of health. This calls for a radical shift from a “system designed around points of medical care primarily focused on disease management, to one that is based in a partnership across time focused on whole health.”

Dr. Steve Woolf, building on Tracy’s presentation, provided data highlighting how social determinants, such as education, housing and transportation create a complex web of factors that determine health and longevity of health. He highlighted how health is determined greatly by socioeconomic conditions (e.g., education, poverty), the physical environment, and health behaviors and encouraged the IM field to “inte grated” these factors into its efforts.

Dr. Peter Wayne encouraged everyone present to “Bring the body back into mind-body research” and proceeded to provide a convincing case that body-based measures are effective predictors for health outcomes including cognition, affective disorders, fall-risk, and all-cause mortality. Peter highlighted new technologies, including those to assess gait, and presented impressive data about the importance of posture, gait and exercise, that changed not only minds but likely the bodies of those at the Congress.

Dr. Helene Langevin shared new data on the importance of connective tissue as the “network” that connects the body’s cells, tissues and organs with one another. Most important, she explained that connective tissue not only transmits mechanical forces within the musculoskeletal system but also constitutes the “terrain” where important immune responses take place. She presented the results of
recent studies showing that stretching promotes the resolution of inflammation and reduces cancer growth in animal models. Her results highlight the importance of a new term for many present, “mechanobiology,” in understanding the mechanisms of some of IM’s physical-based treatments.

Breakfast Roundtable discussions provided rich opportunities to discuss topics of interest from medical cannabis to grappling with the challenges of raising philanthropic funding. Other roundtables provided students with the inside stories of how to navigate research and clinical careers. These open forums reflected pockets of energy and engagement within the Consortium.

During the hours between sessions and plenary lectures, attendees started their days with yoga, tai chi, stepped out to enjoy the glistening sunshine on the harbor, and closed their days at evening receptions visiting posters, exhibits, networking and experiencing the force of IM that is awakening in the Consortium.

This exceptional meeting, would have never happened without so many “hands on deck” led by Congress Co-chairs, Jeff Feldman, Helen Lavretsky, the remarkable talents of the Degnon Team, and the outstanding, tireless Program Planning Committee.

With gratitude to the Co-Chairs and PPC,
Margaret Chesney

Chair’s note: I also want to particularly note Margaret’s tireless work on the meeting, which was essential in pulling together such a large and complex meeting—down to her work to put together this summary at my request!