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RERF Holds 48th SAC Meeting by Zoom March 25–27

The 48th meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)—a body of outside scientific experts that reviews the research programs of the Radiation Effects Research Foundation (RERF) and makes recommendations to RERF's Board of Directors and Board of Councilors with respect to adoption of new research programs and/or continuation or alteration of programs under progress—was held over three days, March 25–27, 2021. This year, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the meeting was held remotely by Zoom centered on RERF's Hiroshima Laboratory.

During the three days, 10 regular SAC scientific advisors participated from the United States and Japan, added to which were four special scientific advisors, totaling 14 participants. Two auditors and 14 observers, including the RERF Board of Councilors, also viewed the proceedings.

The department undergoing extensive SAC review rotates each year. This time, the Epidemiology Department was the subject of review. Also discussed at the meeting were the Research Resource Center (RRC), a still-developing unit tasked with integrating scientific and biosample data and supporting use of such information in collaborative research, creating and managing the entirety of archived records at the institute, and constructing an integrated system using which RERF researchers can search and access the organization's research materials and scientific data; the Biosample Research Center (BRC), an office that centrally manages and preserves in freezers the urine, blood, and other biosamples donated by survivors and their children and consolidates databases of such biosample information; the Molecular Biosamples Department (MBS), which handles research into genetics (heredity/DNA) and genomics (life sciences for the study of the genome and genes), among other work; and the Strategic Plan, a blueprint for RERF's future scientific research and operations.

Dr. Ohtsura Niwa, RERF Chairman, opened the meeting on March 25 by explaining, among other topics, RERF's Strategic Plan, which highlights the importance of understanding not only radiation risks in populations but also such risks in individuals, as well as how to go about giving back RERF's research in some form to A-bomb survivors

and their children.

On the second day, progress in preparations toward RRC establishment was explained. The BRC was next, including its role in future collaborative studies using biosamples from A-bomb survivors and their children. That was followed by an explanation of MBS activities, including a plan for research into genetic effects at the DNA level among A-bomb survivor family groups (called “trios,” indicating parents and a child, with at least one of the parents being an A-bomb survivor) to investigate whether radiogenic mutations are inherited from exposed parents based on comparisons of DNA sequences of the parents and children.

On the morning of the final day, March 27, SAC members discussed their recommendations. Following the deliberations, a press conference gathering eight media organizations was held by Zoom. To start, Dr. Chisato Nagata, Professor, Gifu University Graduate School of Medicine, summarized the three days of discussions in her role as SAC Co-chair. Dr. Jonine Bernstein, the other SAC Co-chair and Attending Epidemiologist, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, was unable to participate in the event given her U.S. location.

Dr. Nagata's summary involved the following: that with the pre-meeting presentation videos, scientific advisors were able to submit questions and comments ahead of time; that because of the meeting's focus, four special scientific advisors with expertise in research resource management/operations and epidemiology also participated; that RERF leadership had developed a sound strategic plan and that the SAC is looking forward to its implementation; that the BRC had made progress in its biosample database and management system (whereby biosamples would be stored in Japan, and those data would be uploaded to ‘the cloud’ for collaborative use) and that its security infrastructure will become increasingly important given plans for collaborative biosample use; that the research conducted by the Epidemiology Department is among the most important elements of RERF work and that expectations are high for future projects; and that the development of the RRC is crucial as a foundation for RERF's future research. The importance of recruiting younger scientists with expertise related to future research activities as outlined in the Strategic Plan was also noted.

Below is a list of SAC meeting participants:

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS

Dr. Jonine Bernstein, Attending Epidemiologist, Co-Program Leader Survivorship, Outcomes and Risk Program, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (Co-chairperson)

Dr. Chisato Nagata, Professor, Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Gifu University Graduate School of Medicine (Co-chairperson)

Dr. Shunichi Yamashita, Vice-President, Fukushima Medical University; Director General, Center for Advanced Emergency Radiation Medicine, National Institutes for Quantum and Radiological Science and Technology

Dr. Andrew Feinberg, Director, Center for Epigenetics, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of Medicine, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Dr. Yoichi Gondo, Professor, Department of Molecular Life Sciences, Tokai University School of Medicine

Dr. Michiaki Kai, Professor, Environmental Health Science, Department of Health Sciences, Oita University of Nursing and Health Sciences

Dr. Fumihiko Matsuda, Director, Center for Genomic Medicine, Kyoto University Graduate School of Medicine

Dr. Francesca Dominici, Professor of Biostatistics, Department of Biostatistics, Senior Associate Dean for Research, Office of the Dean, Harvard School of Public Health

Dr. Nilanjan Chatterjee, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor, Department of Biostatistics, Bloomberg School of Public Health and Department of Oncology, School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University

Dr. Curtis Harris, Chief, Laboratory of Human Carcinogenesis, and Head, Molecular Genetics and Carcinogenesis Section, Center for Cancer Research, National Cancer Institute, National Institute of Health

SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS

Dr. Jennifer Van Eyk, Director, Advanced Clinical BioSystems Research Institute; Professor of Medicine, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

Dr. Hiroshi Masuya, Head, Integrated Bioresource Information Division, RIKEN BioResource Research Center

Dr. Francine Grodstein, Professor, Department of Internal Medicine, Rush Medical College; Epidemiologist, Rush Alzheimer's Disease Center

Dr. Manami Inoue, Chief, Division of Prevention, Center for Public Health Sciences, National Cancer Center

AUDITORS

Mr. Takashi Kohno, Certified Public Accountant and Tax Accountant, Hiroshima All-In Law and Accounting Office

Mr. Paul Dominick Preziotti, Certified Public Accountant; Partner, Johnson Lambert LLP

OBSERVERS

Dr. Satoshi Maruyama, Deputy Director, General Affairs Division, Health Service Bureau, Ministry of Health Labor and Welfare

Dr. Anthony Pierpoint, Director of the Office of Domestic and International Health Studies, Office of Health and Safety, U.S. Department of Energy

Dr. Isaf Al-Nabulsi, Health Scientist Administrator, Japan Program Manager, Office of Domestic and International Health Studies, Office of Health and Safety, U.S. Department of Energy

Mr. Benjamin E. Foster, Energy Attaché and DOE Director, U.S. Department of Energy, Japan Office, Embassy of the United States of America

Dr. Elizabeth Eide, Executive Director, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences

Dr. Charles Ferguson, Director, Nuclear and Radiation Studies Board, Division on Earth and Life Studies, National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences

Dr. Rania Kost, Senior Program Officer, Nuclear and Radiation Studies Board, National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

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Dr. Robert Ullrich, Vice Chairman and Chief of Research

Dr. Kazunori Kodama, Executive Director

Dr. Eric Grant, Associate Chief of Research

Dr. Osamu Tanabe, Chief Scientist/Director of Biosample Research Center

Mr. Shigetoshi Hayashi, Chief of Secretariat