

Celebrating excellence, acknowledging past harms: Both are vital parts of ASHG's continuing journey to advance human genetics

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The March issue of *The American Journal of Human Genetics* is the traditional forum to share the remarks of the winners for several American Society of Human Genetics (ASHG) annual professional awards, as well as respective introductory remarks provided by a colleague. This year, it is a great honor to recognize exceptional scientific leadership of three 2022 ASHG award winners: Peter Donnelly, David Nelson, and Heidi Rehm. As their introducers ably relay, each awardee has made profound contributions to human genetics and genomics research and the ASHG community, and we celebrate their achievements.

This issue also includes the full content of an important, frankly painful report¹ received by the ASHG Board of Directors and released in January 2023 as part of the ASHG Facing Our History—Building an Equitable Future initiative, along with a responsive statement from the ASHG board.² The project's origins stem from the Society's vision to realize the benefits of human genetics and genomics research for people everywhere. In 2018, the ASHG board established diversity as a top strategic priority and, following the height of racial and social unrest in 2020, it charged the Society to conduct a review of its own history. By publishing the report and the board statement in *The Journal* this month, the Society strives to ensure the findings become part of the scientific record for future reflection and discussion.

As the Society said during the report's [release](#),

"The report and its findings are painful and document a history that must be told and taught so we can prevent its resurgence. The human genetics research community is deeply committed to realizing a future in which all people benefit from this knowledge, and this promising research depends on full and equitable participation. By acknowledging our history and apologizing for wrongs, the Society seeks genuinely to form a stronger foundation for trust and inclusion. With today's release, we are making concrete commitments to integrate lessons learned and broader equitable practices throughout our programs, public advocacy and communication, and leadership."

One specific board action involves ASHG's awards program. Given the report's findings regarding specific individuals involved in the American eugenics movement, the ASHG board has immediately suspended the use of

any individual's name for ASHG professional awards. The Board will evaluate current award names for consistency with today's ASHG values and vision and announce changes later this year. As this transition proceeds in coming months, we note that the three outstanding individuals we recognize this month in *The Journal*, as well as all ASHG Award winners up to 2022, received the awards under the historic name of that award. As the award name review is just beginning as of press time, they and other past winners are listed with the original award names in this edition of *The Journal*. Subsequent changes in award names will be incorporated and noted for 2023 and beyond.

Readers will also notice a portrait of the 2022 ASHG President, Dr. Charles Rotimi, on the cover. Beginning in January 2012 and continuing through December 2017, 71 portraits of all past presidents of the Society were pictured on the cover of *The Journal*. By January of 2018, however, the presidents up to that time had been featured, necessitating a different source for cover art for *The Journal*. We believe, however, that recognizing ASHG presidents is an important reminder of the history of the Society and the role of leaders in serving the needs of the human genetics research community and society in general. Going forward, we will feature the previous year's president on the cover of the March issue, in which the presidential address is published. Further, recognizing that Drs. Anthony Wynshaw-Boris and Gail Jarvik were not featured on a cover of *The Journal*, we displayed their portraits on the January and February issues, respectively. We expect that you will find the renewed commitment to diversity in leadership of ASHG will be reflected on the covers of *The Journal* and that the importance of strong and visionary leadership in a time of unprecedented opportunity in our field will be recognized.

As ASHG moves into its 75th anniversary year, the awardee remarks, the reflective report, and recognition of current leadership are important ways we are informing and engaging our community to shape the future of human genetics. We will have additional activities in months to come. In particular, ASHG is excited to be planning special content to highlight major scientific accomplishments and will use many venues, including ASHG journals and our annual meeting, to engage the research community

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as we envision the transformative potential in coming decades. ASHG will also celebrate the power and beauty of human genomic similarity *and* diversity through a year-long campaign titled “one humanity, many genomes.” Combined, we know it will be a full and reflective year, forming a foundation for ongoing excellence of discovery and application to advance human genetics in science, health, and society.

References

1. Jackson, C.S., Turner, D., June, M., and Miller, M.V. (2023). Facing our history—Building an equitable future. *Am. J. Hum. Genet.* *110*, 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2023.02.005>.
2. American Society of Human Genetics Board of Directors. (2023). On the report of the ASHG “Facing Our History—Building an Equitable Future” initiative. *Am. J. Hum. Genet.* *110*, 375–376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajhg.2023.02.006>.