Concluding Remarks

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We have spent an exciting two and a half days enjoying presentations and posters, and were filled with excitement from the new discoveries about the genetics, pathophysiology, and molecular biology of abdominal aortic aneurysms (AAAs). Ten years had passed since the previous AAA meeting organized by M. David Tilson, and the consensus of the participants of the current meeting is that we cannot wait another 10 years but should organize another AAA meeting within 2 to 3 years.

The progress made during the past 10 years has been phenomenal! Multidisciplinary approaches are now being used to address important research questions. This type of approach has paid off. For example, the evidence linking genetic risk factors with AAA development has become increasingly strong with two genetic loci identified. Also, family history for AAA is considered an important risk factor and plays a role even when estimating AAA rupture risks using biomechanical approaches with three-dimensional computer modeling. A large number of studies also shed light on the importance of the inflammatory component of AAA as well as the key role that extracellular matrix-degrading enzymes play in AAA pathogenesis. A great deal of enthusiasm about potential treatment modalities for small AAAs was expressed, and it is expected that clinical trials will occur in the not-too-distant future.

For the field to keep progressing and to foster the many promising leads and advances, significant resources are needed. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute of the National Institutes of Health will continue to support AAA research and seek new initiatives to encourage multidisciplinary approaches. We are grateful for the leadership of Momtaz Wassef in this regard.

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The meeting would not have been possible without the dedicated work of M. David Tilson. He has been a passionate advocate for AAA research for many decades. Many of us consider him a true pioneer responsible for bringing AAA research to the level it is today. His group made many of the initial discoveries on which current AAA research is now based. He was, for example, the first to report on a large collection of multiplex families with AAA. His laboratory also suggested that extracellular matrix-degrading enzymes play an important role in AAA. He worked tirelessly to get the meeting program together in a truly interdisciplinary fashion while covering a comprehensive list of topics and inviting many experts in the field. We feel truly honored for having had the opportunity to work closely with him on the details of the meeting. Dr. Tilson is also an excellent musician, and the participants got a taste of his musical skill during one of the poster sessions when he sat down to play the keyboard wearing his cowboy hat and boots.

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing," said Albert Einstein, the most famous AAA patient. We have many important unanswered questions about the genetics, pathophysiology, and molecular biology of AAA. Addressing these questions will require more than just knowledge. It will require innovative approaches and greater investment of resources to solve the mysteries of AAA, the silent killer.