

From IAMLT to IFBLS – Fifty-four Years of Good Laboratory Practices.

The History of IFBLS



Saminathan Ratanam
Senior Technical Officer
Science Laboratory
School of Science
Monash University Sunway Campus
Malaysia

Introduction

The year 2008 marks the celebration of the 54th anniversary of the founding of the International Association of Medical Laboratory Technologists (IAMLT) presently, known as International Federation of Biomedical Laboratory Sciences (IFBLS). At the 25th World Congress in Orlando, United States of America, the General Assembly of Delegates (GAD) decided that a change in the name of the organization would be more reflective of the educational standards and the roles played by members in the profession.

In 1954, at the invitation of Ms. Elisabeth Pletscher and her Swiss colleagues, the first international gathering of Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLT's) also known as Biomedical Laboratory Scientists together with radiographers took place in Zurich, Switzerland.



Ms. Elisabeth Pletscher opening the 1st Meeting of the IAMLT (Zurich,1954)

Many times, throughout the history of IAMLT, people associated with the IAMLT have written and referred to the 1954 gathering as a very significant event. It established an international

understanding and cooperation among Medical Laboratory Technologists from all over the world (1). Today, the IFBLS which was founded in a very modest way stands big and strong with more than thirty member countries with more than 185,000 members worldwide. The biennial World Congresses remain the major event in the IFBLS calendar. Congress venues have traversed the globe several times, providing opportunities for Biomedical Laboratory Scientists from all over the world to get together, engaging in scientific programmes, educational forums, student forums and social activities.

Fifty-four years of IAMLT (IFBLS) congresses

Since its founding in 1954, meetings of the IAMLT *pro tempore* committees and later the council meetings were held annually and most of these meetings took place in conjunction with some national or regional conferences of Medical Laboratory Technologists such as the Triennial Conference of the Institute of Medical Laboratory Technologists (UK) and the Inter-American Convention in Quebec, Canada (see table 1). It must be noted that not all meetings held between 1954 and 1961 were considered as IAMLT congresses. Table 1 shows the correct numbering of IAMLT Congresses since its founding. The first week-long Congress of the International Association of Medical Laboratory Technologists held in 1961 in Stockholm, Sweden was the 5th Congress. The Congress held in Helsinki, Finland in 1968 was known as the 8th IAMLT Congress. Prior to 1968, all Congresses were known by the cities in which they were held, for example the Berlin Congress of 1966.

In tracing back the development of IAMLT congresses, it is interesting to note that participants from all over the world met in Stockholm in 1986 for the second time, exactly twenty five years after the first Congress was held there in 1961.



Conference participants visiting the Millesgarden, home of the internationally acclaimed Swedish sculptor Carl Milles. (Stockholm, 1961)

Our Swedish colleagues having hosted the Congress in 1961 would never have thought that they would one day celebrate the silver jubilee anniversary celebration of IAMLT Congress. Since IAMLT Congresses are held biennially, one wonders how could there be a silver jubilee (25 years) celebration.

The answer to this riddle is a mere coincidence. The Lausanne Congress held in 1964 should have been hosted in 1963; that is two years after the Stockholm Congress of 1961. But the organizers of the Lausanne Congress felt that by scheduling the meeting a year later, it would facilitate the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of IAMLT; as well as coinciding with the Swiss National Exhibition (Expo) held every 25 years (2). Since then, the IAMLT Congresses has reverted to its usual biennial format. Although there was no mention of the silver jubilee celebration, the 17th IAMLT congress was nonetheless a special occasion for the IAMLT, which

was complemented by a superb Congress dished out by the Swedish counterparts.



The Palais de Beaulieu, the venue of the 10th Anniversary Congress, in Lausanne, Switzerland.



USA delegates en-route to the 10th Anniversary Congress in Lausanne, Switzerland.

After eighteen years, Biomedical Laboratory Scientists from all over the world met again in Stockholm in 2004 for the golden jubilee of IFBLS. Sweden was the second member country after Switzerland to host the IAMLT/IFBLS Congress for a third time in the same city. Today, 2008 we are in New Delhi, India to celebrate the 28th World Congress and looking forward to the next World Congress occasion in Nairobi, Kenya.

Year of congress	Name of congress	Place of congress
(1) 1954	1st Meeting of IAMLT	Zurich, Switzerland
(2) 1955	Triennial Conference of IMLT	Nottingham, UK
1956*	1st Inter-American Convention	Quebec, Canada
1957*	A Delegates Meeting	Amsterdam, Netherlands
(3) 1958	Triennial Conference of IMLT	Bristol, UK
(4) 1959	General Assembly of Delegates	Hamburg, Germany
1960*	Council meeting	Strasbourg, France
(5) 1961	IAMLT Congress (1 st week-long Congress)	Stockholm, Sweden
(6) 1964	10th Anniversary Congress	Lausanne, Switzerland
(7) 1966	IAMLT Biannual Congress	Berlin, Germany
(8) 1968	8th IAMLT Congress	Helsinki, Finland
(9) 1970	9th IAMLT Congress	Copenhagen, Denmark
(10) 1972	10th IAMLT Congress	Vienna, Austria
(11) 1974	11th IAMLT Congress	Paris, France
(12) 1976	12th IAMLT Congress	Chicago, USA
(13) 1978	13th IAMLT Congress	Edinburgh, UK
(14) 1980	14th IAMLT Congress	Durban, S. Africa
(15) 1982	15th IAMLT Congress	Amsterdam, Netherlands
(16) 1984	16th IAMLT Congress	Perth, Australia
(17) 1986	17th IAMLT Congress	Stockholm, Sweden
(18) 1988	18th IAMLT Congress	Kobe, Japan
(19) 1990	1st World Congress of Medical Technology	Geneva, Switzerland
(20) 1992	20th IAMLT Congress	Dublin, Ireland
(21) 1994	21st IAMLT Congress	Hong Kong
(22) 1996	22nd IAMLT Congress	Oslo, Norway
(23) 1998	23rd IAMLT Congress	Singapore
(24) 2000	24th IAMLT Congress	Vancouver, Canada
(25) 2002	25th IAMLT Congress	Orlando, USA
(26) 2004	26th IFBLS Congress	Stockholm, Sweden
(27) 2006	27 th IFBLS Congress	Seoul, S. Korea
(28) 2008	28 th IFBLS Congress	New Delhi, India.
(30) 2010	29 th IFBLS Congress	Nairobi , Kenya.

* Not included as IAMLT Congress

Table1: IAMLT / IFBLS Congress and Congress Cities

Host nations of IAMLT Congresses and Presidents

At the triennial conference of the Institute of Medical Laboratory Sciences (UK) (*then known as the Institute of Medical Laboratory Technology*) held in Bristol, United Kingdom in 1958, the draft constitution of the IAMLT was accepted and its first council elected. R J Bromfield as its first President. He retired in 1961 and Ms. Clementine de Jonk van Beek en Donk from the Netherlands succeeded him as the

next President.

She was the longest serving President of IAMLT retiring in 1966. For the fine leadership she provided and the active role she played since the inception of IAMLT, she was made the second honorary member of IAMLT at the 13th IAMLT Congress held in Edinburgh in 1976. Since then twenty-one Presidents have been elected and served in office. (see table2).



Mr. R.J. Bromfield (the outgoing president) congratulating the newly elected president, Ms. Clementine de Jonk en Donk, as Ms. Elizabeth Pletscher looks on (Stockholm, 1961)

Generally, IAMLT congresses were held in major university cities of the world and occasionally host nations of the Congress were countries where the presidents of IAMLT came from until recent years, whereby Congresses have been held irrespective of where the presidents come from. For example the 25th IAMLT congress was held in Orlando, USA, and the President at the time was from Iceland. The first IAMLT Congress to be held outside Europe was the Chicago Congress

in USA in 1976. Since then, congresses have been held in Durban, South Africa; Perth, Australia; Kobe, Japan; Hong Kong; Singapore; Vancouver, Canada; Orlando, USA and Seoul, South Korea. It was understood that every second Congress would be held in Europe but that has since changed in recent years as well.



Past Presidents of IFBLS: (from left to right) Dennis Slade, Bodil Norstedt, John R. Neal, Shirley S. Pohl and Phillip J. Desmond.

<u>IAMLT Presidents</u>	<u>Country of Origin</u>	<u>Pace of Congress</u>	<u>Duration of Office</u>
R J Bromfield	United Kingdom	Bristol, UK	1958 – 1961
C de Jong van Beek en Donk	The Netherlands	Stockholm, Sweden	1961 – 1964
C de Jong van Beek en Donk	The Netherlands	Lausanne, Switzerland	1964 – 1966
Madeleine Kleits	France	Berlin, Germany	1966 – 1968
Emilie Zahn	Switzerland	Helsinki, Finland	1968 – 1970
Seija Helenius-Asp	Finland	Copenhagen, Denmark	1970 – 1972
Grete Maier	Germany	Vienna, Austria	1972 – 1974
Robert G Houston	USA	Paris, France	1974 – 1976
Guy C Pascoe	UK	Chicago, USA	1976 – 1978
Bodil Norstedt	Sweden	Edinburgh, UK	1978 – 1980
John R Neal	Australia	Durban, S. Africa	1980 – 1982
John R Neal	Australia	Amsterdam, Holland	1982 – 1984
Shirley S Pohl	USA	Perth, Australia	1984 – 1986
Dennis B Slade	UK	Stockholm, Sweden	1986 – 1988
Philip J Desmond	New Zealand	Kobe, Japan	1988 – 1990
Ulla-Britt Lindholm	Sweden	Geneva, Switzerland	1990 – 1992
Ulla-Britt Lindholm	Sweden	Dublin, Ireland	1992 – 1994

Graham Smart	UK	Hong Kong	1994 – 1996
Marja-Kaarina Koskinen	Finland	Oslo, Norway	1996 – 1998
William R Younger	Canada	Singapore	1998 – 2000
Martha A Hjalmsdottir	Iceland	Vancouver, Canada	2000 – 2002
Noel White	Ireland	Orlando, USA	2002 – 2004
Lena Morgan	Sweden	Stockholm, Sweden	2004 – 2006
Ruth Pierce	Canada	Seoul, South Korea	Sept. 2006 - June 2007
Gry Andersen	Norway	Seoul, South Korea	2006 – 2008

Table 2: Presidents of IAMLT / IFBLS

Since the first week-long Congress in Stockholm in 1961, Congresses have been held biennially. IFBLS Congresses have been the biggest contributing factor in keeping the IFBLS going and providing an opportunity for colleagues and students from all over the world to network with one another in an international forum.



Famous for its association with the Nobel Prize banquets, the Stockholm City Hall was the venue of the 1961, 1986 and 2004 congresses.

IFBLS congresses are a vital part of the non-profit organization and must remain so. In 2002, this point became clear when a member nation decided at the last minute to pull out of its agreement to host the World Congress. Fortunately, the American Society for Clinical Laboratory

Science (ASCLS) agreed to take over responsibility from Australia and hosted the World Congress, in conjunction with their own National Conference.

In the autumn of 2005, it looked as if the IFBLS would be experiencing some difficulties in securing bids for the World Congresses beyond 2006 and the then President of the IFBLS, Lena Morgan, announced that there was a lack of bidders for future congresses and urged all member nations to consider the possibility of submitting a bid (3). At the World Congress in Seoul (2006), three bids were submitted and the next two Congresses in 2008 and 2010 would be hosted by New Delhi, India and Nairobi, Kenya respectively.

An enormous amount of effort and good planning go into the success of a World Congress. The 18th World Congress in Kobe, Japan (1988) exemplified the years of hard work, diligence and attention to detail to organize a successful Congress. It took the Japanese colleagues ten years of planning for this congress, having been in Malaysia as early as 1979 to promote the congress. The 26th World Congress in Seoul, South Korea (2006) took more than seven years of planning.

Honorary General Secretary and Executive Director

The contributory role of the honorary

general secretary, later known as the Executive Secretary and subsequently the Executive Director had significant bearing in the development of IAMLT/IFBLS especially in the early years of its founding. Unlike the list of Presidents, the

list of honorary secretary/executive directors is very short indeed. During the fifty-four years of its existence, there have been eight individuals who had held these position (see table 3), some contributing in the capacity of acting Executive Directors.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Position held</u>	<u>Year</u>
E. Pletscher	Switzerland	Hon General Secretary Hon Executive Secretary	1954 – 1973
Dr Ed Burkhalter	Switzerland	Executive Director (First Salaried Executive Director)	1973 – 1977
Guy C Pascoe	UK	President/Executive Director	1977 – 1981
Alex Mc Minn	UK	Executive Director	1981 – 1987
Margareta Haag	Sweden	Executive Director	1987 – 2002
Martha Hjalmarisdottir	Iceland	President/Ag. Executive Director	2002 -2002
Phyllis Mc Coll	Canada	Office Manager	2002 - 2005
Karolin Alkerton-Steward	Canada	Director of Admin/Communications	2005 – present

Table 3: Hon Secretary and Executive Directors of IAMLT / IFBLS

The first and the longest serving honorary general secretary, later known as the honorary executive secretary, was the IAMLT’s founder Elisabeth Pletscher. Her name was synonymous with the IAMLT/IFBLS and to this effect Emilie Zahn, one of the former Presidents of the IAMLT wrote “Ms. E. Pletscher was the real founder of our association having given the vital impulse for the first international congress” (4). Ms E. Pletscher retired in 1973 after serving for 19 years. For the admiration and appreciation IAMLT/IFBLS had for her, she was made the first honorary life member of the IAMLT in 1972 at the Vienna Congress. In one of her personal communications to the author Ms E. Pletscher wrote: “I am always interested in what is going on in the IAMLT - my grown up baby”. Ms. E. Pletcher was to be an honorary guest at the 27th World Congress in Stockholm (2004), but she was tragically killed in a traffic accident in the autumn of 2003.

Dr. Ed Burkhalter was appointed as the first salaried secretary in the capacity of Executive Director on 1st April 1973. He operated from Thun, Switzerland and served until 1977. It was at the council meeting in May 1977 that he resigned as the council was unable to afford the increasing cost that Burkhalter considered necessary. Guy C. Pascoe from UK, then the President of IAMLT agreed to take on the secretarial duties in addition to his presidential duties until the next GAD (5). However, he continued to serve as the Executive Director until 1980, although his term as President ended in 1978. Besides holding the vital post of President and Executive Director, Guy Pascoe had been recording secretary and Editor of Med Tec International during his term of office as council member. As indicated by Pascoe and later decided in the council meeting of May 1979, the post of Executive Director was advertised and Alex McMinn was appointed in early 1981. He operated from the Liverpool Polytechnic in United Kingdom. McMinn retired in 1987 and

Margareta Haag of Sweden was appointed as the next Executive Director. The IAMLT office was moved to Sweden and was located in the premises of the IBL office in Stockholm. Margareta Haag retired in 2002 due to health reasons and these unforeseen circumstances saw Martha Hjalmarsdottir accept the role of Executive Director in addition to her role as president. Working from her native Iceland, this was the second time in the history of IFBLS that the President had also acted as Executive Director. It was during the 26th World congress in Orlando, USA that the GAD passed a resolution to move the IFBLS office to Hamilton, Canada and to be located within the Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science (CSMLS) building. In autumn 2005 IFBLS was officially incorporated in Canada and the transfer of assets from Sweden to Canada was completed in January 2006. The move to Canada saw the need for an office manager and Ms. Phyllis McColl was appointed to this position at the 2002 Congress. The council then decided to employ the services of editor-cum public relations consultant, Karolin Alkerton-Stewart; who had completed a post-graduate program in Public Relations and subsequently interned at the IFBLS. Ms. Alkerton-Stewart was appointed in 2003 as public relations and communication officer, as well as Webmaster-Editor. Upon the retirement of Ms. McColl in early 2005, Ms. Alkerton-Stewart was asked to take on the added duties full time. She duly agreed and her designation now reads Director of Communications and Administration.

Scientific Program of IAMLT Congress

The pattern for the present-day scientific program, social function, trade exhibition as well as laboratory visits all been well

planned from the very early Congresses of IAMLT/IFBLS. Congresses also incorporate recreational and social programmes which include pre and post-Congress tours. The format that was accepted during the first International Congress is well received by both the organizers as well as participants who come from all over the world. Nothing has changed remarkably except that there was a ten-fold increase in the registration fee which was raised from USD 16.00 in 1964 during the Lausanne Congress to USD 150.00 in 1984 at the 16th IAMLT Congress held in Perth, Australia and has kept rising. Since the very first Congress, it has been a five to six days affair, although the scientific programme was not as extensive as it is presently. As expectations change, so do the logistics of the World Congresses and the Board of IFBLS is in constant communication with Congress organizers; to make changes as need be to current Congress planning and hosting guidelines.

In the early years, members raised questions as to why other health care professionals present papers at the Congress of Medical Laboratory Technologists, and today IFBLS World Congresses has numerous BMS professionals and educators presenting quality papers and information, as plenary and guest speakers (6).

Parallel sessions have increased from three (3) in the 15th Congress of Amsterdam to six (6) in the 1984 Perth Congress. Six concurrent sessions were necessary to cope with the influx of papers.



Participants at a scientific meeting.

In the early years, Congresses were held in three languages: English, French and German (7) but for several years now, all Congresses have been done in English, it being the official language of IFBLS.

Trade exhibitions

Trade exhibitions have always been a vital ingredient for the success of IAMLT Congresses. Extensive trade show presentations of the most recent developments in laboratory instrumentation, supplies and methods used in the laboratory medicine has been part of every Congress. Trade exhibitions are the future of Medical Laboratory Technology and besides providing opportunity to learn about new products, exhibits enable one to contribute to the development of new systems by having dialogues with the manufacturers.



Entrance to the trade exhibition at the 18th IAMLT Congress (Kobe, 1988)

Social functions

Traditionally, IAMLT social programs begin with a tour of the host city. It is a wonderful way to get to know the place where a participant is going to spend most of his time while attending the congress. Then, there is a presidential reception which commences a week of social evenings. Every evening of the Congress week is an occasion to remember for most IFBLS congress participants. Packed with social programs, it provides opportunities to become acquainted and renew old friendships. “The social function of IAMLT congresses are informal but enjoyable with food and drinks to please every delegate” – writes John Lewis of IMLS (8).

The official congress banquet or the gala dinner is the highlight of the very busy week. Social evenings are organized and sponsored either by the organizing committee of the congress, government agencies of the host nation or the colleagues in the commercial world of laboratory supplies. Congress social evenings are an experience for participants. Organizers try to put together a unique affair comparable to that of former Congress organizers or better. During the 15th IAMLT World Congress, the

presidential reception incorporated a display of traditional Dutch and Belgian culture and a boat trip on a paddle steamer; the 1984 Congress saw an Australian night sponsored by Ames Miles during the hospitality night; and the Swedish colleagues provided free accommodation in the homes of Swedish Medical Laboratory Technologists and an evening of home visits for participants to experience the Swedish way of life were all very special in their own way. Ten years of planning enabled the Japanese Association of Medical Technologists (JAMT) the opportunity to provide free registration for all participants from developing countries. This was made possible from donations raised from members of JAMT. Many MLTs from South and South East Asia benefited from this good-will gesture.



The Japanese hospitality included a splendid cruise filled with activities on board the cruise liner Sunflower 7 (Kobe, 1988)

Student Forum

The latest inclusion in the IFBLS congress program was the Student Forum. During the Orlando GAD in 2002 while discussing action plan for 2002 – 2004 it was moved to incorporate the Student Forum within the IFBLS congress. The objective of the forum was to build a global network

among BLS students and also to provide continuity of participants in an international forum. It also provided opportunity to meet with the senior members of the profession. Noel White in his invitation said 'Student Forums are a certain way of ensuring that the profession continues to attract new blood and grow and flourish (9). It was tried out during the 26th and 27th IFBLS congresses held in Stockholm and Seoul, South Korea respectively and was reported that the outcome of the forum was encouraging. It was a noble move to involve students to participate actively in an international congress. The need to instill the sense of belonging to the profession that they have chosen at a very young age is important. IFBLS member associations must try and actively incorporate students of the profession.

Participants at IAMLT congress

Attendance at the IAMLT has been very encouraging and is ever increasing. This serves as an incentive and strengthens IFBLS Congresses.



Participants of the 19th IAMLT congress. The Author is sited centre on the front row (Geneva, 1990)

From only, a handful of MLTs from different parts of Europe at the first meeting held in Zurich in 1954 to the World Congress in Seoul, South Korea with more than 8000 participants, the World Congresses continue to be the pinnacle of interaction with other colleagues and health care professionals world-wide.

Table 4: Number of Participants and Participating Countries at IAMLT Congress

<u>Year</u>	<u>Name of Congress</u>	<u>Place of Congress</u>	<u>No. of Participants</u>	<u>No. of Countries</u>
1961	IAMLT Congress	Stockholm, Sweden	300	14
1964	10th Anniversary Congress	Lausanne, Switzerland	620	16
1966	IAMLT Biannual Congress	Berlin, Germany	700	20
1968	8th IAMLT Congress	Helsinki, Finland	470	18
1970	9th IAMLT Congress	Copenhagen, Denmark	400	25
1972	10th IAMLT Congress	Vienna, Austria	660	22
1974	11th IAMLT Congress	Paris, France	800	22
1976	12th IAMLT Congress	Chicago, USA	4500 (4000)*	-
1978	13th IAMLT Congress	Edinburgh, UK	711	33
1980	14th IAMLT Congress	Durban, S. Africa	720	-
1982	15th IAMLT Congress	Amsterdam, Netherlands	806	36
1984	16th IAMLT Congress	Perth, Australia	879	-
1986	17th IAMLT Congress	Stockholm, Sweden	908 (488)*	45
1988	18th IAMLT Congress	Kobe, Japan	1651 (1152)*	41
1990	1st World Congress (19th)	Geneva, Switzerland	1000	54
1992	20th IAMLT Congress	Dublin, Ireland	1400	60
1994	21st IAMLT Congress	Hong Kong	1101 (513)*	49
1996	22nd IAMLT Congress	Oslo, Norway	736 (380)* plus 821 daily registrants	46
1998	23rd IAMLT Congress	Singapore	900	
2000	24th IAMLT Congress	Vancouver, Canada	1267 (904)*	35
2002	25th IAMLT Congress	Orlando, USA	721 (579)*	28
2004	26 th IFBLS Congress	Stockholm, Sweden	700	
2006	27 th IFBLS Congress	Seoul, South Korea	8144 (7797)*	34

* Participants from host country

The General Assembly of Delegates (GAD)

Another important and interesting item in the program of the IAMLT/IFBLS congress is the General Assembly of Delegates (GAD). It is the biennial general meeting of the association held in conjunction with the IAMLT congress. The formal GAD is the highest authority of IFBLS and provides an opportunity for the elected Board of Directors to report to Associate Members on the Federation's

progress since the last meeting and to receive feedback from the delegates and set priorities for the future.

Official delegates of the GAD are participants chosen by the member associations to represent and participate in all businesses carried out at both the Open Forum and the Formal GAD. In the early years of IAMLT General Assemblies of Delegates, non-official delegates were also allowed to participate as observers and contribute to the proceedings of the GAD

(10). This practice was discontinued in later years and only observers were allowed to attend the GAD without participating.



Election of office bearers during the GAD (Kobe, 1988)

The Open Forum provides the opportunity to gather information and prepare reports for GAD. Working groups debate current topics and develop strategies for future activities and inclusion in the Action Plan. The report on the group work is reported to the council and delegates in the formal GAD.

Two half-day sessions are incorporated in the Congress program for the purpose of Pre GAD (GAD Open Forum) and the Formal GAD. The first session being the GAD Open Forum is a meeting of official delegates on an informal manner. All items in the agenda of the GAD are discussed without going on records, at the same time solving most of the problems arising from it. As a result, the Formal GAD on the second day proceeds smoothly with the minimum delay. All items in the agenda are dealt within a few hours in a generally friendly and lively atmosphere. The GAD is usually scheduled for the afternoon and ends by 1800 hours the latest, just in time for a social evening of the week. The longest meeting ever recorded was the GAD held at the Paris Congress which

ended at 1930 hours while the shortest being the Berlin Congress GAD which began at 1500 hours and ended at 1630 hours.



Delegates voting on motions at the GAD (Kobe, 1988)

IFBLS Book Fair

In recent years, another big attraction at the IFBLS congress is the book fair initiated by Dr Glenda Price. A former President of Marygrove College in USA and a well known face in the IFBLS arena. The book fair was first launched during the Dublin congress in 1992 and has grown from strength to strength. During the 21st World Congress of Medical Technologists, there were over 1,000 books for people from the developing countries to help themselves to. This has been an on going event and hope many people will support and continue to contribute to a noble course.

IAML News Letter/Med Tech International/Biomedical Laboratory Science International

Publishing a newsletter or a journal of good quality and sustaining it is vital for any professional organization. It provides a means of communication between the officials of the organization and amongst membership as well as among members itself. The Biomedical Laboratory Science

International was re-launched in 2003 after ceasing publication for two years due to financial constraints. It was first published in 1963 as IAMLTL news letter and was the intention of editor then to publish two or three issues per year. The IAMLTL news letter was renamed as Med Tech International (MTI) with issue number 22 in 1975 with the familiar orange color cover in a semi-journal format. Except for the year 1965 and issue number 23 the newsletter continued to appear twice a year in April and October until 2001. In between there were some changes in the format and size in 1983 and thereafter. With improvement in financial situation, after a short break Biomedical Laboratory Science International or BLSI appeared as an electronic web-based newsletter/journal. Later in 2006 it was reverted to a smaller newsletter medium to be posted online. The publication of BLSI is continued with Karolin Alkerton –Stewart as its Editor-in-Chief.

Throughout the times, one issue has constantly been evident in the publication of a news medium related to the profession and organization and its diversity. There

has always been a shortage of content submitted for publication, seeing the journal dwindle in size from a twenty four page journal in some cases to a two page newsletter again. From the days of the first newsletter, the call for support has continued up to and including the first issue of BLSI when then president, Noel White wrote: “the lifeblood of any publication is words and for these we turn to you, our members”. One of the past President, Editor and Executive Director, Guy Pascoe wrote: “how many times we were to hear this appeal over the years from the executive office and from successive presidents” (11). With more than 30 member associations affiliated and a broader world-wide membership; scarcity, not only for original articles but also news from member associations remains a major problem. If each member society were to write a half page report on their activities once in six months, there would be much material to publish (12). The future of any news medium of IFBLS is in the hands of member associations. Let us look forward for a brighter future with more and regular participation.

Sequence of IFBLS (IAMLTL) Publications and Editors

Number	Year	Editor
1 -7	1963 – 1967	E Pletcher
8 – 17	1968 – 1973	R J Bromfield
18	1973	E. Pletcher
19 – 24 (less 23)	1974 – 1976	Guy Pascoe
25 - 33	1977 – 1981	J R Neal
34 – 36	1981 – 1982	S Phol
No. 1 & 2 (1983) & (1984)	1983 – 1984	S. Phol
No. 1 & 2 (1985) & (1986)	1985 – 1986	D Slade
No. 1 & 2 (1987) & (1988)	1987 – 1988	D J Philip
No. 1 & 2 (1989) & (1990)	1989 – 1990	D Slade
No. 1 & 2 (1991) to No. 1 (1997)	1991 – 1997	D J Philip
No. 2 (1997)		T Reilly
Vol. 1 (2003) -	2003 - present	Karolin Alkerton-Stewart

Conclusion

The prime objective of the pioneers of the International Association of Medical Laboratory Technologists was to provide an opportunity for Medical Laboratory Workers from all over the world to meet and communicate in an international forum and to facilitate learning from one another and to have the ability to discuss common problems encountered in the field.

Fifty-four years past since the founding of IAML/IFBLS and one would wonder if the objectives have been achieved. Yes, as the International Federation of Biomedical Laboratory Sciences stands big and strong with more than thirty member countries, affiliated with some 185,000 members. Successful biennial congresses continue to be held with large numbers of Health-Care Professionals related by the same profession and dedication to quality Health Care and Good Laboratory Practice. Organizers of today's congresses ought to be congratulated for maintaining the vision of Elisabeth Pletscher and her colleagues, who put the organization on its pedestal. As the quote from the famous poem by Sir Henry Newbolt goes, "For men may come and men may go, But I go on for ever." So is the case with IFBLS, some national organizations come while others leave; they may eventually return but the IFBLS keeps going strong. There is always the need to attract more national associations into the IFBLS fold and retaining the current membership has become a priority as well. There are many ways to maintain and achieve new memberships and the Board of the IFBLS is constantly reviewing member benefits and responses from members in regard to what the organization needs and should be doing. Constant evaluation and or auditing of the internal role of the IFBLS is very

important to reach these goals as set out by the membership.

Since the early days of IFBLS, an issue pertaining to the standardization of education, training and equivalence of diplomas and degrees for medical laboratory scientists throughout member countries has been discussed. Currently the IFBLS Board is working with a Core Curriculum Task Force group, established by Noel White. This Task Force is expected to lead to harmonization of education and training of Biomedical Laboratory Scientists. As suggested in the early years by the council, the issue of standardization and harmonization was brought to the level of the Council of Europe (Conseil de l'Europe) to set up a committee to initiate a training program leading to a diploma which would be commonly accepted by all European countries. Efforts are being continued with the hope of succeeding. Subsequently, there was also a proposal to set up a college of Medical Laboratory Technology by the IAML (IFBLS), with the IFBLS acting as an international body for validation of examination of MLTs. A lack of resources was the biggest obstacle in achieving this objective. Logistically, this may not be possible but could move the profession towards achieving a core curriculum for Biomedical Laboratory Science and to develop an international governmental consensus to adopt it. Perhaps through the assistance and recognition of the World Health Organization (WHO), this could be achieved. Fifty-four years has passed and it is time to look forward to the next fifty years and beyond. All involved in IFBLS should pool efforts and resources to bring in more national associations into the IFBLS fold. That in itself will be an achievement.

References:

- (1) Ruth Pierce. The best kept secret. *Can J Med Lab Sci* 2003; 65(6):228-229
- (2) Onique Nef. International Congress of Medical Laboratory Technologists. *IAMLT Newsletter* 1964;4:4-6
- (3) Lena Morgan. From the presidents desk. *Biomedical Laboratory Science International* 2005; 3:4
- (4) Emilie Zahn. Congratulation to the first honorary member of IAMLT. *IAMLT Newsletter* 1972; 16:16
- (5) Guy C Pascoe. Council meetings, London, May 1977. *Med Tec International* 1977; 26:27
- (6) Elisabeth Pletcher. Comment to Mr. Hayden-Smith's 'letter to the Editor'. *IAMLT Newsletter* 1969;10:16
- (7) Guy C Pascoe. IAMLT 1966 Congress, Berlin. *IAMLT Newsletter* 1967; 6:4.
- (8) John Lewis. Letter to the Editor. *Med. Tec International* 1984; 2:1
- (9) Noel White. Student forum. An invitation. *BLSI* 2003; 1:1
- (10) Elisabeth Pletscher. IAMLT biannual report 1968/1969. *IAMLT Newsletter* 1970; 10:2
- (11) Guy C Pascoe. The International Association of Medical Laboratory Technologists- The First Twenty Five Years. 1954 -1980. *Med Tec International* 1984; 1:11-15
- (12) R. Saminathan. The First Twenty-five Years of Med Tec International – A Historical review. *Med Tec International* 1989; 1:9-10

Acknowledgement:

The author is indebted to Mr. R J Bromfield, Ms Grete Maier, Mr. G C Pascoe, Mr. A C Scott, Ms S Pohl and many other friends all over the world for their valuable contribution which made this study possible. Special thanks go to Ms Elisabeth Pletcher and Ms Ulla-Britt Lindholm and her Swedish colleagues for the support and encouragement given in publishing the first edition of the 'History of IAMLT' and Ms Gry Andersen, Ms Lena Morgan and Mr. James Sakwa for reviewing this second edition. And not forgetting Ms Karolin Alkerton-Stewart, the current Director of communication/Administration of IFBLS for her patience in editing this work many times over, for which I am indebted for her.