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Deconstructing Blood Cell Research
Building the Hematology Community

Science Advocacy: Answers to the Key Questions

- February 10, 2022

Why should I care about science advocacy?

As scientists, we find questions that make us passionate and we meticulously seek answers. We communicate our science to other scientists, carefully describing our data in a way that provides new insights but does not over conclude. It is easy to get entirely consumed by this academic cycle of ask, answer, share, and repeat. We identify funding to support our work by describing its importance to groups of our peers, who then evaluate the quality of our experimental plans. It becomes easy to forget what comes before the funding and after the discovery. It is easy to forget that there are government officials, many of which have little scientific background, who decide how much money there is to be distributed and to which scientific areas. And once our discoveries are public, it takes various companies, healthcare systems, government agencies, and so-on to get those discoveries from our benchtop to real world impact.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines an advocate as “a person who works for a cause or group”. **Science advocacy is the work that gives us the resources we need to do our science, as well as the structures necessary to implement our discoveries.** We have all developed an appreciation for science advocacy, watching climate scientists lobby for climate change intervention, and over the past few years watching the many scientists take the stage to “flatten the curve” during the ongoing SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Science advocacy for these critical, immediate threats are imperative to our society. However, I would like to challenge you all to think about your own area of research and think about what science advocacy is needed in that area. The scientists within ISEH are making outstanding discoveries that impact our understanding of hematologic diseases and malignancies, cellular and gene therapies, immunology, adult and fetal hematopoiesis and more. As experts in these areas, it is our responsibility to communicate to the larger community why our work is important and what we need to make advances in these areas.

How do I join in?

We need to give government officials digestible background information, so that when they assign budgets and approve systems for scientific funding or implementation, they actually understand what it is and why it is important. As an international organization this is not one size fits all, but here are some things to consider.

Be active on social media and through other media outlets. Communicate your science on these platforms in a way that the public ear can understand and really emphasize the potential impact. Amplify your publications by allowing press releases and talking to media outlets. Many institutions have helpful resources dedicated to this, such as public engagement representatives or biomedical communications officers. These are especially useful when discussing sensitive topics like animal modeling or stem cell research. We want people outside of the academic community to be as excited about our work as we are.

Engage with your government officials through phone calls, emails, and social media. Determine your specific ask, which is most often sustained or increased funding for biomedical research. Use your personal story and your experience to explain what that money is used for and why it is so critical.

Remember there is strength in numbers. Identify scientific organizations or advocacy groups in your country that are already rallying for improved funding and systems in hematology. Some examples are groups you may already be a part of such as the American Society of Hematology (ASH), the European Hematology Association (EHA), the Japanese Society of Hematology (JSH) or the Hematology Society of Australia and New Zealand (HSANZ).

When you surround yourself with the academic community you may lose sight of the fact that being a

scientist is an extremely unique occupation. You are an expert in an area that many people do not think they can understand. By sharing your story and teaching others about your work in a way they can appreciate, you can propel your contributions to the hematology field even further and truly make a difference in the world.

Any advice for someone who wants to get started?

“Advocacy involves a spectrum of activities ranging from identifying and promoting awareness of the issue and its causes, advocating for change and making change happen. It is important to first gain an understanding of the causes of the issue that you are advocating for. This likely requires some research, whether it be a personal quest (identifying people who have been affected by the issue, talking to them and learning from what they have experienced in their career) or attending meetings/forums related to the issue (if there are any available).

Another step is to promote awareness of the causes of the issue. This can be a sole effort or involve joining forces with like-minded people who are also passionate about the cause (or start off as a sole effort then become a group effort with recruitment of like-minded people along the way, either within your research community or through other communities such as social media platforms). Depending on the cause there may be resistance to change (or whatever cause you are advocating for) and being a part of a team of advocates can be more powerful than trying to do this alone. Having evidence-based data is very important in supporting your advocacy, without data to back up your claims it is difficult to get more people onboard, especially those who are resistant to change for whatever reason.

Making change happen can be done in small steps (e.g., being a committee member and changing guidelines to improve outcomes related to the cause) or larger steps (writing a position paper and using it to advocate to larger organizations, such as funding agencies or government representatives). Advocacy can involve many moments of frustration (there are many who are resistant to change and this causes unnecessary obstacles) but it can be very rewarding when you can achieve an outcome that helps to improve the issue you are advocating for, even if only in small increments.”

Louise Purton, Ph.D.
Professor, University of Melbourne, Head of the Stem Cell Regulation Unit, St. Vincent’s Institute

“There has been an erosion in trust of science in our society, as the pandemic has made abundantly clear. Becoming engaged in advocacy simply means being willing to speak to the public about your work as a scientist. This can be anything from talking to high schoolers about possible future career paths, presenting to community groups about the science behind vaccine development, or speaking to elected

officials about the value of scientific research to society. There is great value in lending a human face to the word “scientist,” and letting people know about the beauty and excitement of the scientific enterprise. What are some ways to get started? Contact a local high school about participating in their annual career fair. Write an op-ed in the local paper about a topic that fuels your scientific passion. Sign up through the ASH Advocacy Network to receive alerts about opportunities to support bills that, for example, provide funding for the NIH. Sign up for the ASH Advocacy Leadership Institute. Participating in advocacy is a great way to reawaken your own scientific passions.”

Katherine Yudeh King, M.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor, Pediatrics-Infectious Disease, Baylor College of Medicine

“Science Advocacy is about building relationships and understanding how your work will make an impact on society - it isn’t easy, takes time and can be very time sensitive.

I am Science Communication Manager for the University of Edinburgh Centre for Regenerative Medicine. What that means is that I help scientists communicate their science to non-scientists, including policy makers, charities and the media. A charity research manager once said to me that is vital not to leave it until you have your big finding before you engage with these audiences. To be a good advocate, they should already know you. If you already know your audience and what matters to them, they will be more receptive to your message. On timing, if you can catch a policy maker at the point they are engaged in that topic, you will be more successful. Tomorrow, they may have moved on to the next issue.

We recently started a campaign called #WhyLabResearchMatters, to build relationships with charity funders of our work. We work in partnership with the charities to promote their work and our research to mutual benefit; growing mutual understanding of the lived experience of disease at the same time as sharing research challenges and progress and developing relationships with the charity. This helps us understand how our research is going to impact the lives of those affected by disease and those with an interest in tackling that disease. Charities are also ideally placed to reach policy-makers, often having staff entirely focused on engaging and communicating with this audience and knowing the policies and issues important to those individuals.”

Robin Morton, Ph.D., MBA
Science Communication Manager, University of Edinburgh Centre for Regenerative Medicine

Where can I find out more?

International:

Journal of Science Policy and Governance
https://www.sciencepolicyjournal.org/

International Science Council
https://council.science/about-us/

International Society of Hematology (ISH)
https://www.ishworld.org/menu/28/history-of-ish

ISH Member Societies

- Mexican Society of Hematology (AMEH)
- Canadian Hematology Society (CHS)
- Japanese Society of Hematology (JSH)
- Egyptian Society of Hematology and Research (ESHR)
- Turkish Society of Hematology (TSH)
- Pan Arab Hematology Association
- Turkish Society Of Pediatric Hematology
- The Thai Society of Hematology (TSH)

United States:

American Association for the Advancement of Science
https://www.aaas.org/focus-areas/advocacy-evidence

American Society of Hematology
https://www.hematology.org/advocacy

EU/UK:

Initiative for Science in Europe
https://initiative-se.eu/

European Hematology Association
https://ehaweb.org/advocacy/

The Academy of Medical Sciences
https://acmedsci.ac.uk/

Australia/New Zealand:

Australian Academy of Science
https://www.science.org.au/supporting-science/science-policy-and-analysis

Science New Zealand
https://sciencenewzealand.org/

Hematology Society of Australia and New Zealand
https://hsanz.org.au/

Asia:

The Association of Academies And Societies in Asia
http://aassa.asia/

Blog post contributed by Mackenzie Bloom and the 2021-2022 ISEH New Investigators Committee.

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- *March 11, 2025*

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- *November 14, 2024*

Each month, Simply Blood spotlights a lab contributing to the fields of hematology, immunology, stem cell research, cell and gene therapies, and more. Get to know groups doing cutting edge research from around the world! This month, we are featuring the Vanuytsel Lab which is based out of the Center for …

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