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Editorial

Proceedings of the 29th ISFG Congress



We would like to dedicate these Proceedings to Professor Peter M. Schneider, who passed away September 8, 2022, shortly after ISFG 2022. His contributions to ISFG and to the field of forensic genetics over more than three decades have impacted us all.

The 29th Congress of the International Society for Forensic Genetics (ISFG) took place in Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States of America. It was the first ISFG Congress held in the United States in the 21st century and led to a record number of attendees from the host country. ISFG 2022 had 787 registered participants from 51 countries with 385 (49%) coming from the United States.

The Congress was planned and organized by the ISFG Board and Scientific Committee (John M. Butler, Walter Parson, Leonor Gusmao, Marielle Vennemann, and Peter M. Schneider) in cooperation with the Local Organizing Committee (Christian Westring, Heather McKiernan, Toni Diegoli, Mechthild “Mecki” Prinz, John M. Butler, Russ & Fran Kraus, Nikki Bibbero, and Casey Damrose). A number of others provided excellent on-site assistance including Jackson Christensen and Mary Lin.

There were 16 pre-congress workshops involving > 750 participants (some attended multiple workshops). The six full-day and 10 half-day workshops provided opportunities to learn from some of the very best researchers and practitioners in forensic genetics:

Full-Day Workshops:

1. **DNA Mixtures (Basic)** - Michael Coble and Steven Myers
2. **DNA Mixtures (Advanced)** - Peter Gill, Corina Benschop, Oyvind Bleka
3. **Kinship Analysis** - Daniel Kling and Andreas Tillmar
4. **Y Chromosome: YHRD, typing and interpretation** - Sascha Willuweit and Lutz Roewer
5. **Testimony in US Courts** – Charlotte Word, Raymond Valerio, Lewis Buzzell
6. **MPS Bioinformatics 101: Exploring Massively Parallel Sequencing Data Analysis using the STRait Razor Suite and FDS Tools** - Jonathan King and Jerry Hoogenboom

Half-Day Workshops:

1. **Contact Traces and DNA Transfer** - Roland van Oorschot and Georgina Meakin
2. **Evaluative Reporting for Contact Traces** - Lydie Samie-Foucart and Tacha Hicks
3. **Phenotyping** - Susan Walsh
4. **Biogeographical Ancestry** - Torben Tvedebrink
5. **Forensic STR Genomics: Sequence variation and nomenclature resources** - Katherine Gettings

6. **NGS Workflows for Forensic Genetics** - Peter Vallone and Kimberly Sturk-Andreaggi
7. **mtDNA Interpretation** - Walther Parson
8. **Scientific Publication: Reading, Writing, and Reviewing** - John Butler
9. **Introduction to Key Concepts in Probability and Statistics for Forensic Science** - Hari Iyer and Steven Lund
10. **Validation – Experimental Design and Analysis using STR-validator** - Oskar Hansson

The bid for hosting this ISFG Congress, which was originally planned for August 2021, came at the ISFG 2017 meeting in Seoul, Korea. Planning began in earnest in November 2019 but soon faced uncertainty due to the global COVID-19 pandemic that limited international travel and in-person meetings. Nevertheless, planning proceeded and decisions were made regarding the overall scientific program and workshop topics. Plenary speakers and workshop presenters were invited to participate in June and July 2020. An impactful decision to delay the meeting by a full year due to the ongoing pandemic was made in September 2020 by the Local Organizing Committee in consultation with the ISFG Board.

Abstract submissions for ISFG 2022 opened in December 2021 and were received until early April 2022. The Scientific Program Committee, consisting of the five members of the ISFG Board along with Congress President Christian Westring and Congress Vice-President Heather McKiernan, reviewed 415 abstracts when they met on April 27–28, 2022. A decision to limit submitters to a single presentation led to a rejection of 73 abstracts where authors had multiple submissions. In the end, 49 oral presentations were selected along with 307 poster presentations. These authors were notified and invited to register for the meeting so the ISFG 2022 scientific program could be completed. Unfortunately, 45 of those invited did not register and were therefore removed from the listing of posters. When the ISFG 2022 meeting was held from August 29 to September 2, 2022, there were 263 posters.

The invited plenary speakers at ISFG 2022 included **Chris Phillips** (Spain) and **Thore Egeland** (Norway), the ISFG Scientific Prize Winners in 2019, along with **Noah Rosenberg** (USA), **David Kaye** (USA), **Tacha Hicks** (Switzerland), and **Debbie Kennett** (UK). Their 45-minute plenary presentations introduced session topics on ancestry testing, kinship analysis, population genetics, legal issues, interpretation, and genetic genealogy.

One of the highlights of ISFG 2022 was a special session on the O.J. Simpson case and trial that was a worldwide sensation when it occurred in 1995. **John Butler** introduced the panelists and provided case background, former prosecutor **Rock Harmon** discussed the evidence

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and presentation to the jury, **Robin Cotton** shared her experience with the DNA testing performed and preparation for the trial where she provided six days of testimony, **Bruce Weir** commented on the DNA mixture statistics and his experience with three days of testimony, and **Chris Plourd** (who was a defense attorney and TV commentator at the time and now a judge in California) spoke on the impact of the case. **Charlotte Word** then led a panel discussion and moderated questions from the audience.

During the opening ceremony, ISFG President John Butler adapted the concluding words of George Washington's first State of the Union speech in January 1790 (see <https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources/state-of-the-union-address>) with some modifications & application to ISFG in brackets: "The welfare of our [scientific society, ISFG] is the great object to which our cares and efforts ought to be directed. And I shall derive great satisfaction from a co-operation with you, in the pleasing though arduous task of ensuring to our fellow [researchers and practitioners] the blessings, which they have a right to expect, from a [well-organized ISFG Congress]." These goals were certainly met in this productive meeting.

Being able to hold an in-person conference was a wonderful blessing to meet with colleagues from around the world. Several invited presenters were unable to attend and with the help of an excellent audiovisual staff were able to present either virtually via Zoom or through pre-recorded videos. The Local Organizing Committee thanks David Kaye, Bruce Weir, and Mengyu Tan for their dedication in providing valuable contributions to ISFG 2022 in spite of not being able to attend in person.

ISFG travel grants were awarded to Adrian Ambroa Condé, Camila Costa, Chiara Fatinato, Marisa Mariano Faustino, Santiago Ginart, Rodrigo Flores Espinoza, Karen Alejandra Garzón Salazar, Annica Gosch, Nelly Gyllö Lind, Flavia Lovisoló, Claire Mercer, Piyamas Petcharoen, Jorge Ruiz Ramirez, Janine Schulte, Alina Senst, and Adam Staadig.

At the conclusion of the meeting, awards were given for the best poster presentation and best oral presentation. The poster award went to **Nidhi Sheth** from Rutgers University and the oral presentation award was won by **Rachelle Turiello** from the University of Virginia. The best poster selection committee involved Peter Vallone (chair), Corina Benschop, Claus Børsting, Katherine Gettings, Catherine Grgicak, Johannes Hedman, Hwan Young Lee, Nicole Novroski, Joel Sutton, Andreas Tillmar, and Susan Walsh. The best oral selection committee included Titia

Sijen (chair), Kimberly Sturk-Andreaggi, Todd Bille, Sofie Clærhout, Marta Diepenbroek, Georgina Meakin, and Maja Sidstedt. The Scientific Program Committee expresses appreciation to the members of these selection committees and congratulations to the award winners.

The ISFG Scientific Prize winners were decided by the ISFG Board with input from a panel of former prize winners (not including John Butler and Walther Parson who are on the ISFG Board). At ISFG 2022, **Charla Marshall**, from the Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory, was recognized with the Scientific Excellence Award and **Bruce Budowle**, recently retired from the University of North Texas Health Science Center, received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Charla has been invited to give the opening scientific prize lecture at the next ISFG Congress in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, to be held September 9–13, 2024.

As part of the ISFG General Assembly on September 1, 2022, **John Butler** was reelected President, **Peter Schneider** was reelected Secretary, and **Lourdes Prieto** was elected Representative of the Working Parties. The statutes were changed to add two Board members. **Corina Benschop** was elected Representative for Training and Education and **Peter Schneider** was elected Operational Manager for ISFG Interests. With Peter's passing, his responsibilities will be juggled by current ISFG Board members and invited guests until these positions can be filled via election at the ISFG 2024 General Assembly unless a special election is held sooner.

We express our gratitude for the planners and participants who made ISFG 2022 a success!

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