Public Affairs Report

Ruth Berkelman Appointed Chair of PSAB

Ruth L. Berkelman has been appointed chair of the ASM Public and Scientific Affairs Board (PSAB) beginning 1 July 2004. Berkelman is the Rollins Chair and director of the Center for Public Health Preparedness and Research at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta, Ga. She was deputy director of the National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCID) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from 1992–1997. She served as the Assistant Surgeon General from 1995–2000 and Senior Advisor to the Director of the CDC from 1998–2000.

The mission of the PSAB parallels that of ASM, which is to advance the microbiological sciences and to promote the application of microbiologically related information for the improvement of human health, economic well-being, environmental soundness, and national security.

The PSAB serves as an essential public policy arm for the ASM, reaching out to inform and influence policies in government; the research, clinical, industrial, and environmental sectors; and national and international scientific organizations concerned with health, safety, environmental, and other policies involving the microbiological sciences. The PSAB comprises the chairs of 12 mission-oriented committees, several cross-cutting topic task forces, and ad hoc expert committees that focus on issues related to biomedical research, public health, agricultural and food microbiology, environmental microbiology, ethical conduct, global health, biotechnology, laboratory practices, microbiological personnel, clinical microbiology, women and minority microbiologists, antimicrobial resistance, bioinformatics, and biological weapons control. Prior to becoming chair of the PSAB, Berkelman chaired the Committee on Global Health.

Berkelman received her M.D. from Harvard Medical School in Boston, Mass., and her A.B. from Princeton University, Princeton, N.J. Berkelman succeeds Gail H. Cassell, Vice President, Scientific Affairs and Distinguished Lilly Research Scholar for Infectious Diseases, Lilly Research Laboratories, who completed three consecutive terms of three years as chair of the PSAB and served as president of ASM from 1993–1994.

Public Health Service Policies on Research Misconduct

ASM submitted comments to the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Research Integrity on the Public Health Services proposed rule on research misconduct. The comments focused on a specific and important provision in the Proposed Rule for policies related to research misconduct. In Section 93.502, the PHS proposes that a single Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) appointed from the Departmental Appeals Board (DAB) Administrative Law Judges conduct hearings on allegations of research misconduct and issue a recommended decision for review by the Assistant Secretary for Health. This procedure would constitute a substantial modification of the current process through which a Research Integrity Adjudications Panel (RIAP) consisting of three members conducts a hearing on charges of research misconduct. ASM pointed out in its comments that hearings on allegations of research misconduct should continue to be conducted before a Research Integrity Adjudications Panel and that, at the request of either party, at least one member of the panel should be a scientist with research experience who is knowledgeable in the scientific area focused on in the hearing. ASM's comments and the proposed rule are available on the ASM website at http://www.asm.org/Policy/index.asp?bid=28397.

Coalition Letter to Expand Stem Cell Research

ASM has joined 141 national patient groups, universities, and scientific societies by signing on to a letter to President Bush urging him to expand the administration’s policy for federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. The letter reiterates the recent bipartisan letters from the House and Senate urging the Administration to modify its policy, which limits federal funding for research on embryonic stem cells to those cells derived prior to 9 August 2001. The letter and accompanying press release are available online at http://www.aamc.org/advocacy/library/washhigh/2004/062504/_1.htm.
Congressional Reception to Demonstrate Support for NSF

On 22 June, Gary King, chair of the Public and Scientific Affairs Board (PSAB) Committee on Environmental Microbiology, and Whitney Tull, public affairs manager, represented ASM at the Coalition for National Science Funding’s (CNSF) Congressional Exhibit and Reception. The purpose of the event was to illustrate the importance of the National Science Foundation (NSF) and support increased funding for the NSF. King presented an exhibit on microbial observatories, mining microbial genomes and microbes, and new energy sources. Over 370 people attended the event, including six Members of Congress (Bartlett R-Md., Coble R-N.C., Ehlers R-Mich., Etheridge D-N.C., Hobson R-Ohio, Regula R-Ohio) as well as John Marburger, Science Advisor to the President and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, Arden Bement, Interim Director of the NSF, and Joe Bordogna, Assistant Director of the NSF.

ASM Members Contact their Congressional Representatives to Support NSF

ASM members, along with others in the scientific community, asked their members of Congress to sign on to a Dear Colleague letter supporting increased funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF). With 157 signatures, the letter was sent on 8 June 2004 to Rep. James T. Walsh (R-N.Y.) and Alan B. Mollohan (D-W.V.), chairman and ranking member of the House Veteran’s Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee, which funds the NSF. Rep. Vernon Ehlers (R-Mich.) and Rush Holt (D-N.J.) initiated this Dear Colleague letter. The final letter is posted on ASM’s website at http://www.asm.org/Policy/index.asp?bid=27010.