



# Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation



journal homepage: [www.bbmt.org](http://www.bbmt.org)

ASTCT Notes

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### **An International Affair: One Doctor Shares his Story of Helping Cellular Therapy Doctors Around the World**

Growing up, Damiano Rondelli didn't want to be a doctor.

In fact, he hated the sight of blood. Born in Italy, Rondelli had other plans—he wanted to be an ambassador, traveling the world to try and fix problems that affected people of all walks of life.

"I wanted to talk to people and work together," he said. "The world was my country."

What he didn't know then was that in his own way he would become an ambassador to the world. Rondelli is the division chief of hematology/oncology and the director of BMT at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Medicine. He is also the chair of ASTCT's Committee on International Affairs, which was established this year to foster relationships among global BMT and cellular therapy groups.

The committee was formed to address a variety of topics, such as joint partnerships with international BMT societies, scholarships for international trainees, development of international education and promotion of international scholarly work.

Rondelli is joined on the committee by some of the top minds in BMT: Mary Flowers, MD, from Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center; John DiPersio, MD, from Washington University School of Medicine; Daniel Weisdorf, MD, from University of Minnesota; Jeff Szer, MD, of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre & Royal Melbourne Hospital; Nelson Chao, MD, of Duke University Medical Center; and Shakila Khan, MD, of Mayo Clinic.

At the 2019 TCT Meetings of ASTCT and CIBMTR, seven abstracts were submitted exploring projects and programs implemented in low- to middle-income countries. These are places where BMT and cellular therapy centers are

desperately needed, but due to barriers—including cost and politics—they're unable to provide care for everyone.

"Is it needed? Yes," Rondelli said. "Is it done? No."

Rondelli came to the committee thanks to his work establishing BMT centers in some of the poorest countries in the world. Always passionate about global issues, his first foray into developing countries was in 2010. Rondelli became close to a fellow at the UIC College of Medicine from Nepal. The fellow asked Rondelli whether he'd be interested in coming to Nepal and giving a few lectures. He accepted.

But when he arrived, he realized just how little Nepal had in terms of health care. He and the fellow worked to get a transplant center operating there, and despite facing huge hurdles (including opposition from other doctors in the country) they managed to open up a BMT center in a Kathmandu public hospital.

From there, he was hooked. He started traveling around the world—to India, Cuba, Bolivia, Nigeria, Ukraine—in hopes of helping doctors there dedicated to helping their patients.

"Imagine if you made what's in the U.S. available to doctors in Nigeria," he said. "How many patients with sickle cell disease could you save? It sounds like a no brainer, but there are so many different barriers. My goal with the society is to connect with people who have the same mission and spirit. To grow the culture, and grow awareness and impact these therapies can have. It will make the society and the world better."

He said it starts by getting doctors abroad proper training at low costs. Many doctors in these developing countries make little money, and in the case of Cuba less than two dollars a day, meaning international travel is seem-

ingly impossible. He said access to journals is important too, as is presenting research at international conferences.

ASTCT is hoping to develop a program sponsoring visiting scholars from developing countries. The Committee on International Affairs is also actively seeking papers from doctors abroad. International relations is important to not just the committee, but also to many of the membership, Rondelli said. Many society members were born in other countries—including Rondelli—and understand the desire to pay it forward.

By utilizing the resources of ASTCT—and by raising awareness among its members—Rondelli hopes to organize efforts to establish BMT and cellular transplantation centers worldwide.

"We have a sense of responsibility to go back and help," he said. "I don't think it's difficult to promote this concept—a lot of people are already doing it. We want to make sure it's done in the most effective way."

Rondelli said his passion for helping others globally is what drives him forward in life. He hopes one day doctors around the world will have access to life-saving medicines and techniques that can improve quality of life for everyone.

He said he's thankful he got over his fear of blood as a child, as being a BMT doctor has led him to some of the richest experiences in his life.

"My life is based on a simple principle: The dignity of any human being is the most sacred thing, no matter who and where they are," Rondelli said. "Anything less is not appealing to me."

#### WHAT'S NEW AT ASTCT

##### **ASTCT Practice Guidelines Mobile App Updated**

ASTCT would like to thank Dr. Miguel Perales for all of his work on the ASTCT Practice Guidelines App. Physicians

around the world are using the app to improve the care provided to transplant patients. The mobile app has been downloaded close to 5,700 times by clinicians in 46 different countries. It was because of Dr. Perales's vision that we were able to launch the app. It is through his efforts, and those of other society volunteers, that we are able to add new tools and information on a regular basis. We also want to thank Seattle

Genetics for their continued support of this tool.

Download the app in iTunes and Google Play.

#### **Register for the Clinical Education Conference**

The sixth annual Clinical Education Conference (CEC) will be held September 19-21 at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, MO. This

multi-day conference for NPs, PAs, nurses, fellows and junior faculty will be focused on the care of blood and marrow transplant and cell therapy patients. The event is hosted by ASTCT in collaboration with Washington University School of Medicine and National Marrow Donor Program/Be The Match® and offers a great opportunity to acquire continuing medical education credits.

For more information, visit [astct.org](http://astct.org)