



MIND INSTITUTE
Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders
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Dear Members of the International Behavioral Neuroscience Society (IBNS):

I write this message to you today extraordinarily proud as your President, for the second year in a row. Next year, I will turn this prestigious honor over to our new President-Elect Dr. Markus Fendt, at the 2025 IBNS banquet, in Tromso, Norway.

Markus Fendt has played such a large role in my presidency and in his role as president-elect, and program committee head, I KNOW that we are in good hands and will have a smooth transition. We had some HUGE successes last year and the meeting was a ginormous success, I'd like to highlight a few of those briefly.

As I had never truly appreciated until the task lay in front of me, The President of the IBNS is not a small undertaking. It has been a unique challenge, that requires a special type of leadership that I am grateful to have had the opportunity to experience. As many of my IBNS colleagues know of my work, not all of you know that I have spent more than 20 years using rodent/preclinical model systems.

My work has strived to design and implement translational strategies using behavior and/or neurophysiological functioning to improve outcomes, quality of life and restoration of hope for individuals and their families. When someone receives a neuropsychiatric diagnosis, it is devastating news, it is news that their loved one has a severe lifelong illness. This can be in the form of a neurodevelopmental disorder perspective, with a life unfulfilled facing them ahead or opposingly, in the form of a neurodegenerative angle, where individuals and their families will literally not be remembered soon and all forms of shared moments of joy are gone.

Even after 20 years, I remain as passionate about translational neuropsychiatric research, as I did when I was a young, baby scientist that didn't know what I was signing up for.

Last year was our 33rd Annual Meeting, in Panama City, Panama, and it was scientifically stellar and a blast of a location for a meeting. For fun, folks saw the famous Panama Canal, the beautiful San Blas islands, went Catamaran-ing, hiked through some of the most protected rainforests in the world, and saw and interacted directly with wild capuchin monkeys; that ate right from your hands, along with tons of more fun, hotel activities that were all readily available for everyone to enjoy by the amazing IBNS Executive Administration, Marianne Van Wagner and Dawn Stafford, that had been in close contact to arrange such outings with the hotel staff. Last year the meeting in Panama (2024) was highly successful with ~270 attendees, from 22 different countries and our plans for 2025 are well underway for Tromso, Norway. By numbers we have 417 active members ~150 regular and student members and ~50 postdoctoral and lifetime members and 17 Emeritus members. Marianne meticulously arranged reports of the IBNS member base with regards to diversity reporting on sex, gender, ethnicity and race alongside a detailed report on the finances of the 2024 meeting. Along with data from our outstanding Treasurer Carlos Bolanos, and the unparalleled organization of Records Councilor Molly Kent, all this material is transparent and available online to members, including SOPs for all of the committees and their chairs.

In fact, our steadfast organization has led to a new finance committee that has a goal of increasing *quality, lasting* membership, and the very serious mission to keep us financially solvent into the future. Past president Jill McGaughy continues to play key roles on the Council with regards to membership and communications, which

includes social media. We need to get out those Whova pictures into the internet world for those who missed the 2024 meeting; Jill M and I are working collaboratively to accomplish this task.

Over the course of my first year as the President of the IBNS, I must admit, I was a little overwhelmed, balancing my thriving lab, the administrative burden as a PI and a busy family life, but with substantial support from several strong key players and Marianne Van Wagner and Dawn Stafford...we are still here and thriving.

While I play an active role in many scientific societies from the big and broad (Society for Neuroscience) to the specialized (International Society for Autism Research), the IBNS is and will always be the most special to me. If you are a scientist that cares about behavior, mentoring, and training our future generations, and are vehemently engaged in social justice reform that ensures that diversity, equity and inclusion, drive our current and future policies; **there is simply no better fit for you than the IBNS.**

The Science of the Panama meeting was unparalleled!

We opened with Tim Bussey, who covered the unified tour de force of his and Lisa Saksida's works, Tim and Lisa have been driven by a desire to understand the neuroscience of cognition and translate that understanding to outcomes that will improve brain health and quality of life in humans. We recently found that their touchscreen tasks are used not only in CogMed and the NIH Toolbox for intellectual disability but in the Baby Toolbox, used for children that can't read yet, AND for profoundly cognitively impaired.

Keynote and Plenary talks on Transcranial Stimulation, Serotonin and Environment, and Engrams, which I finally appreciated are the physical representation of memories. This is a testament to the continued learning opportunities we all get to experience at IBNS where personally I went from not knowing anything about engrams to now thinking they might be the coolest thing since sliced bread.

Symposia on recreational drugs, circadian rhythms, reward and motivation, social behavior, along with classics like Pavlovian Conditioning, were seamlessly interweaved with novel topics like models for eating disorders, which made ALL the talks well attended and intriguing. Other standouts, from my point of view were, "The hot topics interactive sessions" on "**Artificial Intelligence in Behavioral Neuroscience;**" 2) "**Deconstructing Compulsivity;**" and 3) "**Empowering Diversity: Fostering Success for Minority Groups in Science**" had the rooms packed with > 60 participants each.

An additional big highlight was the session organized by the local organizing committee led by Dr. Gina Quirarte on Dementia research from preclinical and clinical perspectives, hitting highlights of sex differences and biomarkers and included data from the Panama Aging Research Initiative – Health Disparities (PARI-HD) program, just established in 2018. Thank you, Gina!

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention, the other MAJOR highlights were the Early Career Achievement Award talk by Nicole Ferrara and the Outstanding Achievement Award lecture by Farida Sohrabji. I look forward to 2025's recipients.

Now, for the coming year, we still have a lot of work to do!

Recently I took part in a panel on the implicit publishing bias (lack of negative data being published). I would love to see the IBNS stand up here and play a role, perhaps by having a session on the topic or by dedicating 2 travel awards to the topic of negative results. This important topic will be discussed at the next council/chairs meeting. Also, while we do better than most disciplines, I wasn't totally convinced that we are putting out the *high-level benchmark* work for rigor, reproducibility and reliability and these are near and dear to my heart, so I am hoping to work more on that this year by some funding mechanism, perhaps with a sponsored partner. Early discussions are in the works for this...

While behavior is in my soul, since the time of my postdoc training in the behavioral phenotyping rodent model laboratory, within the NIMH, under past president Dr. Crawley. I also understand that behavior is easy to hate.

Reviewers undervalue it and specializing in it is highly underappreciated, and early in my career, I was repeatedly dissuaded from behavior, as a tailored focus, which is ironic and sad, because it (i.e., behavior), will never not be necessary and we are extremely short of well-trained behavioral neuroscientists.

My plan for this year is to continue to advocate diligently to ensure we do not lose a generation of behavioral experts because the “establishment” has seen to it that “cell-type specific” and “tech savvy” proposals are rewarded while those that are heavily behavioral and considered “not innovative” when they could accelerate biomedical research. We need to emphasize innovative by translationally relevant behavior and emphasize the purpose of ethologically relevant behavior and highlight our community’s savvy knowledge understands when and why to use each form (translational/ethological/combinations).

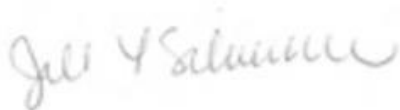
The idea that complex, heterogenous disorders, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, dementia, and autism would be explained by a single cell subtype or single synaptic circuit is silly and much too reductionist for me, personally, as a translational researcher, but I am willing to hear your feedback and how the IBNS can help and advocate on this issue.

I am here to improve mental health and lessen symptom severity for affected individuals by these debilitating *behavioral disorders* and believe now and always that behavior is *irreplaceable*. **I truly believe that our IBNS community together will ultimately make the differences in research, that others’ cannot, and that one lab alone, cannot.**

It remains disheartening that now in the year 2024 bad behavioral studies both in execution and interpretation are still rewarded in high impact journals (my hypothesis is a lack of rigorously trained reviewers)? Why is good, rigorous behavior not incentivized, simply for being good, comprehensive, rigorous, and reproducible? How do we, the IBNS, advocate and attempt to set precedents to insure this is the practice?

As I stated above but it is worth mentioning again, I continue to be humbled, thrilled and proud to be serving this organization alongside the spectacular council, records councilor Molly Kent, and the tireless efforts of the executive offices of Marianne Van Wagner and Dawn Stafford.

Looking forward to amazing year with you all, my brilliant, talented colleagues,
Jill.



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