Letter from the ENETS Chairman

As I write this letter, I remember last week and how fortunate I was to be welcomed into my new role as ENETS chairman by so many of you at our 3rd Annual Conference in Prague. If you attended the meeting, you know that the number of participants was large: The final tally shows that we were 706 in attendance. And new membership applications keep coming in: at the end of March we stand at 378 members. For a scientific society dedicated to a rare illness such as neuroendocrine tumor disease, I would call this a tremendous success. Needless to say, I am optimistic about my next two years in office.

This spring 2006 issue of the ENETS Newsletter is an important one, as we consider our past events and look to the Society's future. The inside features highlights from the Prague conference. Feedback has been positive, with comments on the quality of the presentations and the conference organization. As well, participants have requested a greater focus on case presentations and more discussion of treatment and management issues. I can assure you that the Executive Committee is taking all suggestions into consideration as we get plans underway for the organization of the Barcelona 2007 meeting.

The same consideration is being given to the very fruitful discussion that took place during the Society's General Assembly meeting in Prague. Please have a look at the meeting's summary on the back page of the Newsletter. I am pleased that we could find consensus on the matter of broadening ENETS' appeal and opening membership to all medical professionals. We still have plenty of work ahead of us, though, namely the formation of an effective advisory board and task forces, as well as the development of a unified NET registry. As discussed in Prague, these months before the Barcelona conference will be significant and I welcome any and all suggestions for improving the Society.

Wouter de Herder, M D
Chairman ENETS
The 3rd Annual ENETS Conference in Prague:
A Huge Variety of Encouraging Approaches
By Thomas Bisswanger-Heim, MD

With more than 700 participants, the 3rd Annual ENETS Conference in Prague attracted nearly double the number of guests who attended last year’s Cracow conference. The participants in Prague represented every continent, as well as every discipline related to neuroendocrine tumor research, and the speakers included 40 experts who are at the forefront of gastroenteropancreatic NET research.

Change of Command for the Future, Honoring Past and Present Achievements
A significant event during the congress was the handing over of the ENETS’ chairmanship from Bertram Wiedenmann of Berlin to his successor Wouter de Herder of Rotterdam. Both expressed optimism at the growing influence of ENETS, which currently claims about 400 members, and in further contributing to a significant improvement of diagnosis and treatment of NET patients.

Another highlight of the conference was the bestowing of the Society’s annual Life Achievement Award, which was conferred in absentia on Dame Julia M. Polak of London, who is distinguished by her formidable merits in NET research, as well as in research on tissue engineering. Martyn Caplin of London presented the award to Dame Julia at her office in London in February, and she then gave a short presentation of her research and demonstrated her clear enthusiasm for the field. This presentation was filmed and shown to the conference delegates in Prague.

Vegetation's Annual ENETS Conference in Prague: A Huge Variety of Encouraging Approaches
The conference’s social program, as well, attracted many of the guests. Participants were taken on a tour through Prague and then brought to one of the city’s most stunning palaces, the Žofín Palác, for a gala dinner and live music.

The Latest in NET Research: Reason for Optimism
In recent years, angiogenesis has been increasingly defined as a pivotal point of tumor biology. ‘Since usually vascularization in NET is high, the identification of angiogenesis markers and angiogenesis-active compounds seems to be crucial for innovation in NET diagnosis and therapy,’ said Philippe Ruszniewski of Clichy, France. According to the presentation of Jean-Yves Scoazec of Lyon, France, there is a close interaction between tumor proliferation, hypoxia and release of angiogenetic factors, such as vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF). In many tumor entities vascularization has been shown as a parameter associated with a poor prognosis. As Scoazec pointed out, in NETs the prognostic impact of vascularization seems to depend on the tumor location. So in NETs of the foregut or pancreas, vascularization seems to indicate a prognostic advantage.

‘VEGF has a key role in the induction of angiogenesis,’ James C. Yao of Texas pointed out. For instance, possible antiproliferative effects of somatostatin analogs, as well as of interferons, are at least partially mediated by the inhibition of VEGF and an insulin-like growth factor (IGF). Yao reported on the first encouraging results with new ligands targeting VEGF and its receptors. Bevacizumab, a mononuclear antibody against VEGF-A, was evaluated in a clinical study composed of 25 patients with progressed carcinoid disease. Bevacizumab-treated patients showed a considerable reduction of tumor blood flow compared to patients treated with PEG
Another promising therapeutic approach in the VEGF field is, as Yao pointed out, the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR), which is a key enzyme in the VEGF-induced signal-transduction cascade. After encouraging preclinical results, the mTOR-inhibitor RAD001 has reached the stage of clinical studies as well.

‘Other potentially antiangiogenetic compounds with preliminary but very encouraging results are, for example, PTK/ZK und PTK787,’ said Will Steward of Leicester, UK. As another possible approach for NET therapy, Steward mentioned the inhibition of cell cycles, for instance with Ro 31-7453, which interrupts mitose and induces apoptosis.

‘There is a large variety of promising approaches in today’s NET research,’ the new chairman de Herder concluded. New somatostatin-receptor ligands like SOM 230, radioreceptor therapy with new tracers or histone-deacetylase inhibitors are just some examples in what he calls the huge diversity of NET research. Consequently, de Herder sees many reasons for optimistically looking ahead to the future of NET research.