

## Amir A. Zeki, MD AFMR President, 2015–2016

It is my pleasure to submit this essay on my experiences with AFMR, for the 75th Anniversary Celebration. My initial contact with AFMR was in 1999 while I was a 2nd year medical student at the University of Washington School of Medicine. As a scholar in the Independent Study in Medical Science (ISMS) program, I had a small part in helping investigate the effects of antioxidant vitamins on cholesterol levels and lipid therapy under the tutelage of Professor B.G. Brown. I will never forget the sunny January morning I had to give a 10 minute oral presentation; it was my first presentation at a medical conference organized in part by the Western Region AFMR (WAFMR). It was both nerve-racking and exhilarating. This was my first published abstract in medicine. Since then, the AFMR has had a major impact on my early career development.

It was during this meeting in 1999 that I learned more about AFMR and the Tri-society Carmel meetings in Carmel, CA; a strong Western tradition in a beautiful part of the California coast. After recovering from my podium presentation, I walked the seaside city and attended different sessions in cardiovascular medicine, endocrine, and surgery. I saw the threads that connected different organ systems through the lens of research. It was a gift and an indelible experience. AFMR remains as the only organization that features multidisciplinary meetings and, by its culture and mission, is “translational” and promotes cross fertilization across different fields. Isn’t this what the NIH is looking for?

My experience as an ISMS scholar during medical school and my experiences at the WAFMR/Carmel meeting put me on a path that has led to my career today. As an internal medicine resident I completed several small research studies that led to abstract publications. But it was not until my fellowship (2005–2008) that I had the fortune of connecting with an excellent mentor and lab. I took this opportunity seriously and pursued additional years of training in the lab. I had my own project, an idea I developed and lead independently but under the guidance of accomplished scientists and caring colleagues. It was during these years that I revived my contact with WAFMR and the Carmel meetings. I did not miss any meetings, and some years gave 2 or 3 research podium talks/posters. The intimate and smaller setting of the Carmel meeting made this my favorite conference. Unlike the hustle and bustle of international or national conferences, Carmel was accessible. The “big names” in pulmonary science came from many of the Western programs, sat in the front row and asked questions about my data. They gave advice and spoke kind words of encouragement. I will

never forget this. Then in 2009, I attended the combined Midwestern Region AFMR/Central Society for Clinical Research (CSCR) Meeting in Chicago. Dr. William W. Busse saw my poster, asked pointed questions, and encouraged me to publish my findings. For those who don’t know him, he is a major figure in the world of asthma, and to say the least, this interaction inspired me to push on. Within a week after the conference, I had an invitation to submit my paper to the journal *Translational Research*. The work was published in 2010.

It was through the interactions I had with a former WAFMR officer that I became more involved. He asked me to become a WAFMR Council Member (2011–2012) and to attend the Officer’s business dinner. As a KL2 (K12) scholar I also attended the 2012 Eastern AFMR and Translational Science meeting in Washington, D.C. At this AFMR meeting I was invited to give a podium talk in one of the Scientific Sessions as a Henry Christian Award recipient. In addition to the outstanding science talks I heard, one presentation in particular stood out. Professor William N. Kelley gave an inspirational talk titled “*Reflections on a Career in Science and Medicine*.” Dr. Kelley imparted much wisdom condensing five decades of experience, but one thing in particular jumped out – the great advocacy efforts AFMR undertook to help usher in the NIH K award funding mechanism and Loan Repayment Program (LRP). These programs have benefited countless young investigators like me, and continue to do so. These are concrete accomplishments due to the efforts of past AFMR leadership, and their dedication, passion, and hard work. As a former LRP awardee and current K08 recipient, I can directly attest to this pivotal contribution by AFMR.

It was also during this 2012 meeting that I attended my first AFMR National Council meeting. In this same year, I was nominated and elected as WAFMR Chair-elect, and served as Chair in 2013–2014. And in 2014, I received the WAFMR Outstanding Investigator Award which allowed me to give a brief talk during the Plenary/Symposium; a great experience on many levels. I am honored to be involved in this organization. It is a wonderful privilege to serve and participate in AFMR’s important mission. Best of all, I get to work with a stellar group of colleagues and friends from around the country. These are genuine and truly inspired individuals who believe deeply in what they do and in AFMR. In a time when sarcasm rules, it is refreshing to see the opposite. I am grateful for this opportunity, and I hope I can give as much to AFMR as I’ve received.