

# Latin American Association for the Study of the Liver

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Founded in Sao Paulo in 1968, the Latin American Association for the Study of the Liver (ALEH) was created by enthusiastic hepatologists from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela. The creation of this Society was inspired by both the European and the American Liver Associations.

ALEH represents 14% of the world territory, accounting for more than 650 million people living in English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. The mission is to promote the importance of the study of the liver through a variety of activities, including the global exchange of specialists sharing their experiences in the clinic and in their research centers. ALEH's vision is focused on building and promoting leadership for and within the region. We value the perspectives of local and international thought leaders and hope to be the catalyst for ongoing scientific collaboration.

We continue to strengthen our participation in multiple international activities with sister societies, including the Global Liver Summit held at the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the European Association for the Study of the Liver (EASL) yearly meetings. During the International Liver Congress held in Barcelona in April of this year, together with the AASLD, EASL, and the Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver (APASL), we signed the Joint Society Statement for the "Elimination of Viral Hepatitis as a public health threat by the year 2030."

Throughout its 50-year history, ALEH has had 25 presidents from nine countries comprising Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, and the Dominican Republic. The Society actively supports local, regional, and international scientific meetings throughout Latin America, amplifying the importance of collaborative initiatives, such as the development of regional guidelines.

The recent XXIV ALEH Congress held in Santiago, Chile, had more than 600 attendees and approximately 180 abstracts, posters, and oral presentations, showcasing more than 50 speakers from around the world. A postgraduate course offered by the Hospital Clinic in Barcelona, a joint ALEH and AASLD Research Workshop by young investigators, a Symposium of Acute on Chronic Liver Failure by the European Foundation for the Study of Chronic Liver Failure, and a postgraduate course provided by the Mayo Clinic from the United States were offered to members and to all who attended in addition to the parallel and plenary conferences.

Work groups made up by the current groups of interest within the Association (hepatitis C, liver transplant, hepatocellular carcinoma, drug-induced liver injury, autoimmune and alcoholic liver diseases) met to encourage collaborative studies and secure regional epidemiological data on particular diseases. The general assembly allowed the delegates to learn about the activities of the last 2 years and the plans for the future and held a forum to ask questions and provide feedback. As is tradition,

*Abbreviations: AASLD, American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases; ALEH, Asociación Latinoamericana para el Estudio del Hígado; APASL, Asian Pacific Association for the Study of the Liver; EASL, European Association for the Study of the Liver.*

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the closing of the assembly included the transition of the presidency from Chile to the Dominican Republic.

The ALEH South Pacific Summit held in Chile in July 2015 focused on understanding the past, the present, and the vision for the future. Modifications of the bylaws, the establishment of the ALEH Executive Office in Santiago, the creation of a permanent board of 10 ALEH members, and the establishment of the ALEH Foundation were some of the important achievements.

ALEH supports diversity, and as a result many of the members have received training in a variety of countries, including Spain, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Latin America. In less than 2 years, we have participated in more than 20 regional conferences, promoting the alignment and collaboration of both liver and gastroenterology societies. Supporting the members is a priority that allowed ALEH to promote and support the publication of three books: *Hepatology* written by Martin Tagle and Alejandro Bussalleu from Peru, *Hepatology* by Juan Suarez from Ecuador and Miguel Bruguera from Spain, and more recently the book *Liver Pathology* by Miguel Bruguera.

As a result of the relationships with other international liver societies, ALEH was present with its first official booth at the EASL Congress in Vienna in April and at the AASLD Congress in San Francisco in November 2015. ALEH was delighted to reciprocate during our Congress last September.

The ALEH Foundation is a nonprofit organization capable of securing resources necessary to advance the study of the liver in Latin America. It is not surprising that there is a shortage of liver disease experts in the ALEH region. Consequently, the disparities, including access to liver transplants and treatment advances, are a sad reality, especially in the more resource-limited countries. ALEH has signed several agreements with well-known international and Latin American liver units and universities in an effort to foster the exchange of expertise and one day make these disparities a challenge of the past. As a result of ongoing involvement by our

members at meetings and congresses across the world, the Society has built a world-class network of recognized experts and leaders in the field of liver disease.

ALEH's recent changes have set the stage for a brighter future. The plan for the years to come focuses on achieving several goals, beginning with closer collaboration with the 16 countries' societies and their members. We look forward to the opportunity to participate and support local activities focused on medical education and advances in clinical management.

A primary focus for ALEH will be the development of a regional health policy on liver-related diseases and access to world-class clinical care and treatment. We will invite and encourage the public health decision makers and the key opinion leaders in every country to join forces for a healthier region. We have a commitment and the responsibility to develop a policy that will be equally focused on policies for public awareness of liver diseases, the promotion of clinical studies, surveillance, epidemiological data, and capacity building where needed. The recent treatment advances and cure for hepatitis C make our work all the more important. Together we can make a difference advocating for more and better resources for better diagnosis, earlier treatment, the benefits, and the urgent need to increase access to care.

Another important goal in ALEH's future is to provide educational programs at basic, intermediate, and expert levels. We will offer a 2-day clinical hepatology course with state-of-the-art lectures and an emphasis on treatment to be held next year in Bogota, Colombia. This course will be enriched with presentations of the best abstracts on treatment from AASLD, EASL, and ALEH. At a higher expertise level, the Association will offer two annual scholarships to physicians interested in obtaining a Master in Hepatology from the University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain. The Association is also in the process of assembling a semi-online course for a Master in Hepatology sponsored by the Autonomous University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain, and the

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University of Alcalá, Alcalá de Henares, Spain, that will be offered to all our members.

The 2018 ALEH Congress is being organized and will take place in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Regional and international experts will provide the attendees with cutting-edge medical updates, treatment advances, real-world experience, clinical management of liver diseases, and tools to complement their professional development along with best practices for managing a medical practice. The ALEH Governing Board has assumed the responsibility to encourage basic, clinical, and collaborative investigations throughout the region. With the help of AASLD and

EASL, a course is being provided that will help the participants learn to conduct basic and clinical research.

Finally, ALEH is the product of 50 years of hard work, dedication, and the commitment of medical leaders and experts in the field of liver disease. The Society has a responsibility to continue strengthening the foundation for medical education, research, clinical-care advances, world-class treatment, and access to health care for all. It is a challenge that ALEH assumes with humility and passion.

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is to not stop questioning.” Albert Einstein