



**Dena Lyras**  
President of ASM

I hope that this Vertical Transmission finds you and your families, friends and colleagues safe and well. Across Australia, we continue to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, mostly through the restrictions that have been imposed to prevent transmission of the virus. Thankfully these measures have been highly effective and we have not seen the high case numbers and deaths that we see reported daily in other countries.

One impact of the pandemic for the ASM this year has been the postponement of the Annual Scientific Meeting. We are not alone here – many national and international meetings have been cancelled and efforts are being made to find alternative ways to share our work and ideas and to interact with colleagues. We have made similar efforts – ASM held a very successful ‘virtual’ EduCon for our Microbiology Educators this year, and has been holding monthly ASM Hour multi-presenter seminars online, as well as other state-based virtual meetings.

Before the pandemic, the ASM had already begun considering ways to make virtual participation available for those who were unable or unwilling to travel to meetings; this crisis has expedited this process. We had discussed making meetings more accessible to a wider set of our members, for instance those from regional areas and those with disabilities, as well as those with caring responsibilities, who find it difficult to travel. Many of our members were also travel fatigued from attending too many meetings and were concerned about the carbon footprints they created by taking international flights.

The situation we find ourselves in this year has pushed us to rethink the concept of meetings entirely. One benefit of the

changes catalysed by the pandemic is the improvement to online platforms as a way of sharing work and creating virtual meetings. The tools for online conferencing have been rapidly developed and refined this year, and offer us an excellent opportunity to bring new and accessible meeting formats to our broad membership. It is hoped that they will also allow greater participation and be more inclusive of those who find it difficult to travel to meetings. Virtual meetings offer other advantages; for example, submitting questions online through moderated chats can help students or early career staff feel less intimidated and become more engaged, and recordings can be distributed for even greater outreach through ‘asynchronous delivery’ – a term familiar to our teaching colleagues.

Although online meetings mimic some aspects of conventional meetings, they cannot substitute for the face-to-face interactions that are necessary for forging working relationships and the serendipitous encounters that foster discussions and collaborations. Poster presentations can also fall flat in an online setting.

Many of our members have suggested that they would like the best of both of these options after the threat of this pandemic has passed. Now that the idea of virtual meetings has become acceptable, and the technology has been developed to make them work well, it is possible that the ASM may be able to open up conferences, meetings, workshops and seminars to remote participation. We will take the best of all of these options to serve as many of our members as possible. It is certain that meetings will be very different in the coming years, but we can take advantage of the experiences of 2020.

As always, and to be informed of the changes to our meetings at state and national levels, please visit our website [www.theasm.org.au](http://www.theasm.org.au) to access information regarding upcoming meetings and awards. Our website showcases content created by our wonderful ASM Communication Ambassadors and I encourage you to read the interesting and entertaining content created by our younger members. You may also like to follow and contribute to ASM on Twitter, @AUSSOCMIC or on Facebook to make sure you keep up with the latest news, trends and developments in Microbiology in Australia and around the world.

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