

# Meet the Candidates on the RCMB Assembly Ballot

## Program Committee

Gisli Jenkins, BM, MD, MRCP(UK), PhD  
Christopher M. Waters, PhD  
Gisli Jenkins, MD, PhD

## Nominating Committee

William Janssen, MD  
Scott Budinger, MD  
Yohannes Tesfaigzi, PhD  
Rory Morty, PhD

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## PROGRAM COMMITTEE



### Gisli Jenkins, BM, MD, MRCP(UK), PhD

#### Who am I?

I am Gisli Jenkins an NIHR Research Professor and Professor of Experimental Medicine at the University of Nottingham and attending pulmonologist at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust. I am originally from Iceland, although have lived most of my life in the UK. I received my undergraduate medical degree from the University of Southampton (UK) and my PhD in Biochemistry from University College London (UK) and undertook post-doctoral training at UCSF (USA). I have been a member of the ATS and Respiratory

Cell and Molecular Biology Assembly since 2010, and have served on the RCMB Program Committee (2012-2016), RCMB Nominations Committee (2018-2019) and the RCMB Planning Committee (2019-2020).

#### 1) Why did I choose the RCMB?

My research has always focused on understanding the fundamental mechanisms of disease, and pulmonary fibrosis in particular. This has involved understanding the key molecular and cellular processes that subvert normal wound healing responses into pathological fibrotic processes. It was therefore an obvious choice for me to join the RCMB and support and encouragement from inspirational mentors such as Dr Geoff Laurent and Dr Dean Sheppard, who helped guide my career, certainly help cement my decision that the RCMB was the best assembly to join.

#### 2) What are RCMB strengths and weaknesses?

The RCMBs strengths include its mission to understand the biological basis of lung disease, the close association with the Red J and the fantastic community that make up its assembly membership who manage to merge science and fun. The RCMB

provides a wealth of opportunities that directly feed in to the assembly's mission through research, education and facilitation. It has provided some particularly innovative material including the podcasts and online journal clubs. However, there are some weaknesses that in the current climate are particularly important, notably around advocacy and policy. If 'the RCMB exists to promote the long-range goal of the ATS to decrease morbidity and mortality from respiratory disorders and life-threatening acute illnesses' then it is crucial that the information we discover as scientists is used to inform policy. The lungs one of the most easily damaged organs and uniquely susceptible to environmental insults often promoting disease many years after injury and it is vital we advocate for what we know to be important: clean air, the climate emergency and equality. Furthermore, as our lungs know better than most, we live in one world and as such it is vital that the RCMB represents the global community, not just the USA and I believe further internationalisation of the RCMB would strengthen RCMBs mission and vision.

3) What is your approach to leadership?

For me leadership is about creating a shared vision that everybody can then buy into. This requires listening to individuals and communities and fostering a spirit of collaboration to ensure that everybody feels as though they are contributing to, and benefitting from shared successes. This requires understanding the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation, and individuals within it, and then harnessing the strengths as well as mitigating the weaknesses, or better still, turning those weaknesses into strengths through realignment of objectives with the overall vision. My goal is always encourage participation and foster an environment where there is no fear of failure stifling the desire to succeed. By encouraging everybody to challenge themselves and patriarchal hierarchies as well as perceived wisdom I hope to provide leadership that promotes both equality and innovation.

4) What is a fun fact about yourself?

Whenever I travel abroad I try and rent a bike to cycle up the local hills. This can lead to unexpected consequences. Recently, I cycled up a mountain to attend an International Summit in ILD taking place at the top, with clothes to change into in my backpack. It turned out the meeting had started a little earlier than planned, or it had taken me longer to cycle up than I thought, and out of time to change clothes I attempted to slip in to the auditorium unnoticed in my red lycra. However, a certain eagle-eyed Dr Richeldi from Italy rather unfairly invited me to sit on a panel in my lycra, as an impromptu panel member (looking a little hot and bothered) despite the program suggesting my presence was not required.



## **Christopher M. Waters, PhD**

### **Who am I?**

Christopher M. Waters is the Donald T. Frazier Professor of Physiology and a member of the Saha Cardiovascular Research Center at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. Dr. Waters received his undergraduate degree in chemical engineering from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, a Master of Science degree from the University of Miami, and his PhD from Vanderbilt University. He has been a member of the ATS since 1995 and is a longstanding member of the Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology Assembly. He previously served the assembly as a member of the RCMB Program Committee (2017-2018), and he is currently a member of the RCMB

Planning Committee. He currently serves on the Publication Policy Committee for the ATS, and he is a member of the search committee for the Editor-in-Chief of the *Annals of ATS*.

Dr. Waters' research has focused on the role of mechanobiology in lung disease. He has investigated mechanisms of acute lung injury, including ventilator-induced lung injury, airway and alveolar mechanics, cellular biomechanics, epithelial barrier function and wound repair, inflammation, and the pathophysiology of acute respiratory distress syndrome. Dr. Waters has directed and collaborated on NSF- and NIH-sponsored projects in these areas for over 20 years. He has mentored trainees at all levels in his lab.

Dr. Waters is currently on the editorial board for two ATS journals (*American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine* and *American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology*) as well as the *American Journal of Physiology: Lung Cellular and Molecular Physiology* and *Physiological Reports*. He is currently a standing member of the Pulmonary Merit Review Panel for the VA, and previously served as a member of the Lung Injury, Repair, and Remodeling study section for NIH. The RCMB assembly is large and scientifically diverse. While this is generally a strength, it does create some challenges for the assembly. Dr. Waters hopes to work with the executive committee to strengthen the RCMB assembly.

Fun Fact: Dr. Waters once met Princess Diana in a receiving line where he held up his young daughter to shake hands with her.

## NOMINATING COMMITTEE



**William Janssen, MD**

### Who am I?

I am a physician-scientist at National Jewish Health in Denver, Colorado. My career centers around the care of critically ill patients and research that seeks to understand the mechanisms that regulate acute lung inflammation and tissue repair. I joined the ATS during my first year of fellowship in pulmonary and critical care medicine in 2002. As my career has progressed, so has my involvement in the ATS and in the Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology (RCMB) Assembly. For the past several years, I have served on the RCMB Program Committee.

My involvement in the RCMB has enabled me to meet physicians and scientists from around the world and has broadened my scientific horizons. Through the RCMB, I have formed a number of friendships and collaborations that would not have otherwise been possible. The RCMB provides a platform by which junior investigators can meet leaders in the field and expand their research. At the same time, it provides an organizational framework through which established researchers can interact, present their work, and explore new areas.

One of the strengths of the RCMB is its size and the breadth of areas it encompasses. However, this can also be an impediment. One can easily get overwhelmed by size and complexity of the RCMB, much like the ATS itself. This was certainly true for me early in my career. When I first joined the ATS, I did not have a mentor to help guide me. However, by becoming involved in committees and working groups I've been able to find a home in the RCMB. My involvement was also aided by participation in the ATS Emerging Leaders Program. As a result of these experiences, I've gained an appreciation for mentoring within the ATS, and especially within the RCMB. I embrace strategies that promote engagement of newer members and I seek out opportunities to promote the involvement of emerging investigators. On a personal note, I enjoy traveling with my family, downhill skiing, and competing in marathons and triathlons.



## **Scott Budinger, MD**

### **Who am I?**

I am a physician scientist who enjoys the way that discovery-based research informs the care of patients with lung disease, particularly pneumonia induced injury. My work focuses on understanding why older individuals do worse during critical illness and why they fail to recover. I see my primary role as Chief of Pulmonary and Critical Care at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine as supporting and mentoring young researchers, including physician scientists, Ph.D. scientists and clinician researchers as they develop a program of scholarship and an academic career. I believe those same principles should guide the leadership at RCMB.

I think we should provide opportunities for young investigators to take leadership roles in our Assembly and in ATS, we should tailor our awards to recognize the accomplishments of young investigators and we should encourage the ATS to maximize financial support of research, focusing our resources on the next generation. In addition, I would like to see our Assembly lead the ATS in the ongoing revolution in genomic technologies and data sciences that are altering the landscape of discovery-based research and clinical practice. I know that many within the RCMB share this vision., establishing our assembly as a source of present and future thought leaders at ATS and a welcoming venue for the next generation of ATS research.



## **Yohannes Tesfaigzi, PhD**

### **Who am I?**

As a cell and molecular biologist, I have been interested in the many fascinating pathways that constitute the innate immunity of the airway epithelium. In 1998, I joined the ATS, and within the Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology (RCMB) Assembly, I have served as a member of the Program Committees for RCMB and Thoracic Oncology Assemblies. The RCMB is a great platform for investigators with research focus in cell and molecular biology to interact with each other and connect with members of other assemblies. Dedicated RCMB members facilitate the organization and scheduling of fascinating sessions that inform physicians, scientists, and patients of the latest scientific progress. RCMB has also been instrumental in encouraging young scientists to be involved in assembly goals and provide a pipeline for new ATS leadership.

I believe that diversity will be crucial for making groundbreaking progress in the future, and RCMB with the many members from around the world is poised to reach heights that we can only imagine at this time. Having been raised in Africa, trained in Europe, and having worked in the US for many years, I have developed the sense of how things are expressed differently among different cultures. Thinking back, it is people with a broad cultural understanding who have helped me broaden my mind to a level that I can help others. When I joined the ATS, I did not have a mentor who helped me navigate the complex structure of such a big Society and, therefore, experienced firsthand that cultural diversity can be a major impediment to get involved and contribute to the fullest. Also, my approach to leadership has been influenced by the need to be sensitive to people who may express their thoughts differently and to translate their thoughts in a way that others can understand it. On a personal note, I enjoy various activities with my wife and two children, including playing musical instruments, or tennis, go hiking, and trying out foods from different cultures.





## **Rory Morty, PhD**

### **Who am I?**

Dr. Rory E. Morty is the Principal Investigator of the Research Group “Structure and Development of the Alveolus” at the Max Planck Institute for Heart and Lung Research in Bad Nauheim, Germany; where Dr. Morty’s research interests include understanding the mechanisms of post-natal lung development, and the aberrant development of the lung in clinical entities where lung development is affected, such as bronchopulmonary dysplasia (BPD) in preterm-born infants. Dr. Morty is jointly-appointed at the University of Giessen School of Medicine in Giessen, Germany. Dr. Morty is actively engaged in scientific publishing in the lung arena, currently serving as Editor-in-Chief of the *American Journal of Physiology – Lung Cellular and Molecular Physiology*. Dr. Morty is also keenly involved in the education and training of lung scientists and clinician-scientists, where he currently serves as (i) Programme Director of the International Graduate Programme “Molecular Biology and Medicine of the Lung” at the University of Giessen School of Medicine; (ii) as Coordinator of the University of Giessen and Marburg Lung Center School; and (iii) as co-Coordinator of the German Center for Lung Research Academy. Remaining with the career development of early career members, Dr. Morty has recently concluded his term as Fellowships and Awards Director of the *European Respiratory Society*. Dr. Morty has been an active member of the *American Thoracic Society* since 2002, where he currently serves on the Editorial Boards of both the AJRCCM and the AJRCMB; has formerly served on the Programme Committee of the RCMB Assembly; and has served as speaker, chair, facilitator, and symposium organizer at every ATS international Conference since 2005. Dr. Morty looks forward to supporting the ATS as a member of the Nominating Committee of the RCMB Assembly.