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History of the International Conference on Biological Membranes

It was in Milan, in March 1963, that a small group of leading scientists heavily involved in studies on membranes decided to meet regularly to evaluate research in their fields of expertise. Among those present were Jim Danielli, Jean Brachet, David Robertson and Walter Wilbrandt. After much animated discussion, it was decided unanimously that a permanent conference should be established, and named the International Conference on Biological Membranes. The present Symposium marks the 30th anniversary of this series of conferences, which took place biannually.

Our first international conference was held in June 1965 on 'Biophysics and Physiology of Biological Transport' in Frascati, Italy. Early participants included Torsten Teorell, Walter Stoeckenius and Fritiof S. Sjöstrand, who all contributed importantly to the success of these early meetings. At the same time, the Scientific Council of the Conference was enlarged and included, among others, Aharon Katchalsky, Carl Cori, Feodor Lynen and Salva Luria. The second Conference, entitled 'Membrane Models and the Formation of Biological Membranes', was also held in Italy, but since 1971 subsequent conferences have been held in Crans-sur-Sierre in Switzerland.

These first conferences covered a wide range of topics related to the structure and function of biological membranes, including specialized meetings on almost all aspects of membrane organization. Among these, the importance of the lipid structure of membranes, the mechanism of hormone and drug action, as well as receptor-mediated endocytosis, membrane compartmentalization, aspects of nervous activity, and the function of cell organelles were covered.

The present Conference has continued this tradition, and was marked by a particularly broad coverage of membrane phenomena. Plans for future meetings are under way.