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Review of the 33rd World Congress | Berlin

Immediate Post-Operative Folliculitis: A Foreign Body Reaction, Not an Infection

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ABSTRACT

Immediate post-operative folliculitis (IPF) refers to the development of inflammatory lesions such as pustules or papules around the transplanted hair follicles shortly after a hair transplant procedure, typically within the first 1–7 days. This condition can arise due to one of two primary mechanisms: 1) foreign body reaction or 2) surgical trauma. This is generally self-limiting in nature and does not involve bacterial infection. Proper differentiation from infective folliculitis, which typically occurs later, is critical for appropriate management.

Keywords: immediate post-operative folliculitis, foreign body reaction, surgical trauma

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INTRODUCTION

Folliculitis is defined as inflammation of the superficial or deep portion of the hair follicle.¹ Immediate post-operative folliculitis (IPF) typically presents within the first few days following hair transplantation and is characterized by erythema, papules, and pustules surrounding the transplanted follicular units (FUs). The prevalence of IPF in the recipient site reported in literature varies widely from 1.1% to 20%. On the other hand, with proper care, IPF in the donor area is uncommon after follicular unit excision.

Though not life-threatening, IPF is an important complication to address due to its impact on patient satisfaction, downtime, and concern for graft survival. As these lesions were traditionally believed to be infectious in nature, prophylactic antibiotics have been advocated as a preventive measure. (See Figure 1.)

FIGURE 1. Left: Immediate post-operative folliculitis is characterized by erythema, papules, and pustules surrounding the transplanted follicular units. Right: Patient with folliculitis 5 days after hair transplant; the folliculitis did not resolve with the use of oral antibiotics.



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President's Message

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From Berlin's Unity to Rio's Celebration of Integrity

As I begin my term as ISHRS President, I feel a strong sense of purpose and profound appreciation for the values that have

shaped our organization. At the core of our mission lies one principle above all: integrity.

Integrity is not just an abstract concept for ISHRS; it is the foundation of all that we do. Our patients trust us during some of the most vulnerable moments in their lives. Our colleagues and future generations in the field rely on us to uphold high standards. The public and regulatory bodies look to us to ensure that hair restoration surgery is conducted with ethics, competence, and compassion. Without integrity, we risk losing our credibility; patients may face safety issues, and our specialty may be defined by those who do not share our values. Therefore, now more than ever, integrity must guide every action and innovation we undertake.

As your president, I believe that integrity can only flourish through collaboration and unity. By fostering open communication and a shared vision, we can create the culture and safeguards necessary to make integrity a reality in our lives, rather than just an aspiration.

BERLIN 2025: UNITY IN ACTION

The power of unity was on full display at the 33rd World Congress in Berlin, which I was privileged to attend alongside many of you. Under the skilled leadership of President Dr. Ricardo Mejia and Program Chair Dr. Sam Lam, Berlin became a model showcasing how our united community can drive progress. Whether sharing laughter in Bavarian hats at the welcoming reception or focusing intently in masterclasses, we found common ground in our commitment to the highest standards of hair restoration surgery.

A notable highlight of the event was the series of live surgery sessions held in the beautiful city of Potsdam, expertly organized by Drs. Nina Otberg and Andreas Finner. These live demonstrations allowed attendees to observe and engage directly with advanced surgeons, illustrating how collaborative learning fosters growth for everyone.

The Bourlesque and Roaring Twenties Gala, complete with jazz music, feathered cabaret dancers, and an impressive laser show, served as a reminder that joy, celebration, and creativity are vital elements that unite our community.

YEAR-ROUND EDUCATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Our common dedication to meaningful, in-depth education extends beyond our World Congress. Over the past year, we have witnessed growth in participation and learning in collaborative events with regional partners. The successful Regional Workshop in Tbilisi, Georgia (July 2025), provided early-career colleagues in the region with an intimate and supportive setting to develop their skills and

confidence. The Repair Workshop in Bucharest, Romania (November 2025), provided an opportunity to examine complex restorative surgeries in depth.

Our Global Council societies play a vital role in promoting the ISHRS tradition of education and collaboration. Events like the upcoming HAIRCON by the Association of Hair Restoration Surgeons-India in Chennai, India (February 2026) and Live Surgery Workshop by the Hair Restoration Society of Pakistan (February 2026) ensure that our shared standards and innovative spirit transcend borders and cultures.

Looking ahead, our ISHRS Europe Live Surgery Workshop (May 2026), graciously hosted by the Italian society SiTri in conjunction with their bi-annual meeting in the Eternal City, offers another unique opportunity for members to experience live demonstrations and engage in discussions on advanced techniques, best practices, and the ISHRS's spirit of unity and collegiality.

UNITY AS THE PATHWAY TO INTEGRITY

Through all these initiatives, one essential lesson is clear: unity is not an end in itself but a vehicle that moves us toward our goals. We need integrity to lead us in the right direction. Together, we can uphold, defend, and teach our core position that only properly trained, licensed physicians should perform hair restoration surgery. Integrity is more than a guideline; it is a promise to our patients, our profession, and ourselves that we will always stand for competence and ethics—never compromising.

RIO DE JANEIRO 2026: INTEGRITY ON THE WORLD STAGE

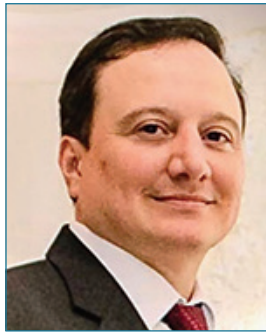
Building on this momentum, I invite you to join us at the 2026 World Congress, to be held October 15-17, 2026, in Rio de Janeiro. Under the leadership of Program Chair Dr. Maxim Chumak, the meeting will celebrate not only our achievements, but also the core values that sustain our progress. Set against the vibrant colors, energy, and captivating rhythms of bossa nova, Rio offers an inspiring venue for learning, collaboration, and live demonstrations—and above all, for showcasing how integrity continues to guide and empower our work.

In every session, and every gathering on those tropical evenings, our collective message of integrity will be clear: the ISHRS is united in our standards and unwavering in our ethics—today and into the future.

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

I encourage all of you to get involved: participate in our webinars, attend our workshops, engage with Global Council events, and share the important message of integrity within your home institutions and communities.

Together, the ISHRS will adapt to the changing landscape of our specialty and lead the way in transforming it, building a future where integrity takes its rightful place. ■



Co-Editors' Message

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This final issue for 2025 comprehensively

covers—in both pictures and text—one of the most anticipated events of the year: the 33rd ISHRS World Congress in Berlin. We would like to thank Drs. Mauro Speranzini, Sharon Keene, and Marie Schambach for their hard work in writing up and sharing pearls from many of the general sessions and masterclasses. We also would like to highlight the unique real-world educational opportunity that the Live Surgery Workshop provided on October 26 and thank the chair Dr. Nina Otberg and co-chair Dr. Andreas Finner as well as all operating surgeons, faculty, moderators, and patients for this key component of the World Congress. The meeting, orchestrated by Dr. Sam Lam and the planning committee, successfully captured the essence of hair restoration as a sophisticated fusion of technology, innovation, biological understanding, artistry, reconstructive skill, and essential teamwork.

This issue's case reports focus on vital themes such as patient safety and the prevention of complications. Drs. Flora Tse and Bertram Ng's, "Immediate Post-Operative Folliculitis: A Foreign Body Reaction, Not an Infection," addresses a common post-operative occurrence. The authors explain that immediate post-operative folliculitis (IPF), typically appearing within the first 1-7 days post-transplant, is generally a sterile inflammatory reaction resulting from surgical trauma, sebaceous gland trauma, or a foreign-body reaction, not a bacterial infection. This crucial distinction is made by noting that IPF lesions are usually self-limiting, and systemic symptoms are absent. The authors caution against the routine use of prophylactic antibiotics due to risks of hypersensitivity and resistance, and instead propose using a low-dose course of oral steroids to mitigate inflammation and significantly reduce IPF incidence.

Conversely, Dr. Saran Pholsen, in the report "Recipient Site Infection Following Dull Needle Implantation: A Case Report and Lessons Learned," details a postoperative recipient site infection that developed despite standard antibiotic prophylaxis, likely linked to the reuse of a sterile dull implanter needle. Dr. Pholsen emphasizes the necessity of strict infection control and the use of sharp, sterilized, or single-use instruments to prevent trauma that can predispose the site to infection. Adding to the complication discussions, Dr. Ximena Vila's case report, "Arteriovenous Fistula of the Superficial Temporal Artery as a Complication of a Hair Transplant," discusses a rare vascular complication. An analysis of cases by the authors suggests that a previous hair transplant should be considered a potential risk factor for developing an AVF.

In his first message as ISHRS President, Dr. Conradin von Albertini affirms that integrity is the foundation of our mission and the essential safeguard for our patients, our profession, and the future of hair restoration surgery. Through

unity, collaborative education, and global engagement—from Berlin 2025 to Rio 2026—Dr. von Albertini emphasizes that shared values, ethical practice, and collective commitment are what truly drive progress and excellence.

This month's Editor Emeritus, Dr. Jerry Cooley, reflects on professional growth and enduring friendships. Additionally, Dr. Cooley warns us that FUE surgeons aiming for megasesions often overlook key principles of the field. By aggressively harvesting beyond the safe donor zone, they risk causing visible thinning years later. Dr. Cooley's reflections serve as a reminder that the patient's long-term outcome should always guide our surgical approach.

We would like to thank Dr. Pierre Bouhanna and Dr. Marie Schambach for their letters to the editors. It is important to acknowledge the years of work and dedication from colleagues who help us learn from their experience and teachings, as well as those who continually push to keep improving our current therapies and surgical techniques.

In "Hair's the Question," Dr. Sara Wasserbauer offers a second set of questions on eyebrow loss diagnosis and replacement. From the importance of proper angulation and direction, preview long hair, and the complexity of treating patients with prior tattoos or scarring from tattoo removal, her column will undoubtedly test your knowledge and experience.

In his final message as ABHRS president, Dr. Rana Irfan reflects on 2025's achievements, proudly highlighting the unwavering dedication of ABHRS diplomates and noting the Board's global leadership in patient safety, ethical practice, and excellence in hair restoration surgery.

The issue also includes a meeting review covering the successful ISHRS Regional Workshop in Tbilisi, Georgia, held July 5-7, 2025. The workshop, hosted at the Talizi Hair Transplantation Center, showcased four complete live surgeries covering male and female hairline restoration, and featured advanced techniques such as beard and eyebrow transplantation, long-hair FUE, and scar repair.

Lastly, this is our final co-editors' message. Our words of gratitude go to those who helped us throughout our tenure: to our managing editor and mentor, Cheryl Duckler, for always showing us the road and pushing us to strive for excellence; to Victoria Ceh, ISHRS Executive Director, who always gave freely of her time and assistance whenever needed; to the ISHRS Executive Committee and Board of Governors for their unconditional support; to our dedicated columnists, who we consider experts in our field: a big thank-you for allowing us to propose different ideas. And to our family—Rahil, Erika, Elise, Michelle, and Luis—for their steadfast support.

If we could offer one piece of advice from our three wonderful years as co-editors, it is that surgical excellence is achieved not only through superior technique but also through proactive planning, critical self-evaluation, and a deep commitment to the long-term well-being of our patients and our colleagues. ■



Notes from the Editor Emeritus, 2005–2007

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I've just returned from the 33rd Annual Scientific Meeting of the ISHRS in Berlin and thought I would share some personal thoughts. This meeting will mark almost 30 years since I began attending ISHRS meetings. I know I'm not as old as some, but I think I've earned "old-timer" status and can share some reflections.

The first is about the value of long-term friendships. Prior to the meeting, I met up with an old friend, my French pen pal from high school. We've stayed in touch and visited each other over these almost 45 years. Just as in meeting up with my pen pal from high school, meeting up with colleagues for a scientific congress is really more of a chance to hang out with old friends. When you have developed some close friendships, you become a part of each other's lives and the yearly congress becomes more of a reunion.

But beyond the merely social aspect of it, having trusted long-term colleagues has been invaluable to me in terms of professional development. Every year we have the opportunity to "check the pulse" of our specialty and find out what everyone is doing. But you don't just want to know what everyone is doing, you especially want to know what the people you trust and admire are doing. "Did you try that yet?" "What tools/instruments have you used this year that you like?" This information is like gold but generally requires more than just a superficial acquaintance.

If you're an extrovert, going to your first meeting and meeting a bunch of people may not seem daunting, but for us nerdy introverts, it's another story. If that is the case, I suggest forcing yourself to get involved: present an abstract, join a committee, write and submit an article to the *Forum*, and ask lots of questions. We're a pretty small society, and it doesn't take too much work to make yourself known if you push a little. Before you know it, you'll be making friends from around the world!

Another "old-timer" observation (imagine two grumpy old men sitting on a park bench, complaining about the "young generation"): we are ignoring the safe donor area at our own peril! Every year, I am blown away at the level of

technical expertise demonstrated by FUE surgeons around the world—but I'm also concerned that in our exuberance we have ignored one of the fundamental tenets of our field. From the perspective of a 30-year practicing surgeon, I have been surprised many times at how hair loss progressed in some of my patients. I've cared for many patients who, 10-15 years after their surgery, discontinued their medication and subsequently returned to see me. I have often thought how glad I was that I had not taken a more aggressive approach.

In the past, we were limited by how many grafts we could safely perform in a given session. Now that guardrail seems to have come off and now it is possible to perform up to 10,000 grafts by plundering a virgin scalp (+/- body hair). While I encourage pushing the advancement of our field, I think at some point we have to ask ourselves whether what we are doing will stand up over the long term. And if not, is the patient being warned about this as a required part of informed consent?

From my old-timer perspective, and as someone who served in leadership roles within the ISHRS, I've heard many of the same criticisms of the meetings: "We should have more lectures on... (fill in the blank)." While we are unified in our passion for hair, there are many differences amongst us and there is simply no way of creating a meeting everyone will be happy with. Some want more lectures on surgical techniques, others on the latest medical advances, and still others on basic research. The program chair has a nearly impossible job, and I think Sam Lam did a masterful job of balancing these competing interests.

Finally, it was a pleasure to see Cheryl Duckler receive recognition for her 25 years as managing editor of *Hair Transplant Forum International*. Having served as a co-editor, I can tell you much work goes into each issue. Without Cheryl's tireless efforts, we would not have made it across the finish line with each *Forum*. Put simply, you would not be reading this right now without Cheryl! Kudos to Cheryl, as well as to Natalie and Luis for all of their hard work over the past three years. The ISHRS—through its meetings and the *Forum*—is thriving in the capable and dedicated hands of those who lead it. ■