

## EDITORIAL

### 1 The Society for Environmental Geochemistry and Health (SEGH): 2 building for the future

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57 The challenges of sustainable development are ever more pressing, and the skills, interests and  
58 capabilities of the SEGH member are well placed to continue to make more meaningful  
59 contributions to the environment, society and well-being. We reflect on the historical development  
60 of the Society, its response to the dynamic international research landscape and the great  
61 opportunities ahead. In 2018, SEGH implemented a new board structure after 2-3 years of  
62 consultation, with approval of a new constitution and a new strategy across the large number of  
63 international board members. Whilst regions were represented by sections in Europe,  
64 Asia/Pacific and the USA, the structure required renewal in order to be more representative of the  
65 distribution of members and website traffic that had evolved in preceding years. In addition, the  
66 society wanted to improve its position for future growth opportunities across rapidly developing  
67 regions.

68 SEGH has been a welcoming society for early career researchers (ECRs) over the years,  
69 providing a supportive and encouraging atmosphere at conferences. However, a formal structure  
70 was required to continue to engage and support ECRs as they become established in their  
71 careers. In addition, retention and recognition of experienced scientists and practitioners was  
72 required for past and on-going contributions to the long-standing success of SEGH since the  
73 initial formation in the early 1970's. The Society for Environmental Geochemistry and Health  
74 (SEGH) was first established in the USA to provide a forum for experts to work together in  
75 understanding the interaction between the geochemical environment and the health of plants,  
76 animals, and humans. Wixson and Davies (2019) recently provided an account of the Society's  
77 formation.

78 We offer this account of current initiatives and future aspirations to enhance the value that this  
79 society can offer to the SEGH community and beyond.

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### 81 **Evolution of SEGH**

82 The new international board structure of SEGH was formalised in 2018 so that there are now four  
83 representatives from each of the European, Americas, Asia/Pacific sections, with an additional  
84 African section established at the SEGH 2018 34<sup>th</sup> International Conference in Victoria Falls,  
85 Livingstone, Zambia (Watts et al., 2018). There is scope to co-opt and elect more board members  
86 in order to cover wider geographic and multidisciplinary aspects as a way of reinforcing the  
87 aspirational nature of SEGH.

88 Elected board members in 2018 came from the UK, Portugal and Greece for Europe; Kenya,  
89 Nigeria and Zambia for Africa; China, Japan and Pakistan for Asia/Pacific, and the USA and

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90 Mexico for the Americas. Co-opted members enthusiastic to undertake new initiatives for growth  
91 in new regions/countries include Canada, Egypt, Ghana, Iran and Panama, with discussions  
92 progressing elsewhere.

93 In 2018, the first group of 22 ECRs (early career researchers) was established at the SEGH 2018  
94 conference with initial plans to develop a programme of mentorship, training activities and  
95 interaction over a three-year period. ECR members were connected with appropriate SEGH  
96 'experienced' and relevant members as mentors. This grouping is open to new ECRs as we  
97 evolve the programme and balance the demographics. The ECRs have been encouraged to  
98 establish a community to improve communication through social media and become involved in  
99 the peer review process for Environmental Geochemistry and Health (EGAH). The ECRs as a  
100 group are ideal for generating and testing new ideas and identifying trends to develop SEGH and  
101 potentially grow as individuals for succession management of the international board.

102 In 2019, SEGH launched a new Fellowship status for SEGH (FSEGH) encompassing senior  
103 researchers who have been engaged with SEGH for a number of years and maintained their  
104 membership., as well as demonstrating that they have worked hard in the EG&H field, and  
105 supported the society in a variety of ways. The ECR group will have an opportunity to progress  
106 through to FSEGH via nomination from SEGH members, as will senior members with continuous  
107 scientific engagement and support of SEGH.

### 108 **Environmental Geochemistry and Health (EGAH) Journal**

109 Environmental Geochemistry and Health is the official journal of SEGH published by Springer  
110 Nature, to which all members can subscribe and access the back-catalogue online via  
111 [www.segh.net](http://www.segh.net). The journal has been refreshing and updating the list of coordinating editors who  
112 are essential to the peer review process for articles submitted to EGAH. Candidates for this role  
113 who can commit to supporting the peer review process are welcome, particularly where SEGH  
114 can improve geographic diversity and coverage for emerging trends across multidisciplinary  
115 themes and reinforce the involvement of health practitioners (clinical and public health) /  
116 epidemiologists. The journal has experienced continued and solid progress, particularly in recent  
117 years, with the Impact Factor progressing steadily (2018: 3.252) and the number of papers  
118 submitted increased from 400+ in 2016 to 600+ in 2018, with a 40% acceptance rate.

### 119 **Future challenges**

120 Various challenges have resulted in a reduced membership in the USA in recent years, (which  
121 had been the cornerstone of the society for much of its history) although SEGH is not alone  
122 among societies in this experience. Growth in rapidly developing regions has balanced overall  
123 SEGH membership numbers. Greater geographical diversity across the Americas is required to  
124 ensure management succession, and efforts are on-going to develop hubs to regrow membership  
125 in the Americas.

126 The peaks and troughs in membership in Asia/Pacific, largely reflected by the well-attended  
127 SEGH international conferences in China, are both an opportunity and challenge to manage the  
128 membership and require imaginative solutions to retain and stabilise memberships between  
129 conferences. Nevertheless, core members from Asia are regular attendees at annual  
130 conferences as the conferences rotate between the regions.

131 An increase in African membership following on from the 34<sup>th</sup> International Conference at Victoria  
132 Falls-Zambia shows promise for continued engagement with the African science community. The  
133 African board members have provided an example to other regions for regular communications,  
134 in particular making use of current communication platforms (e.g. WhatsApp and Skype) which

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135 have attracted additional senior researchers to online discussions to develop new SEGH hubs in  
136 Africa.

### 137 **Future meetings and conferences**

138 Traditionally, annual international conferences have rotated between regions, with the exception  
139 of the USA. Often members have drifted away during the 2-3 year cycles, unless smaller  
140 meetings or co-hosted meetings with other societies were organised, which more commonly have  
141 occurred in Europe. The SEGH board is backing an initiative on a wider scale to engage with  
142 traditional sponsors of our international conferences to support smaller regional meetings on a  
143 more frequent basis. Other options may need to be considered such as the use of online  
144 webinars and web-streaming of keynote presentations.

145 Recent and future conferences and meetings include: Slovakia in 2015, Belgium and Ireland in  
146 2016, China in 2017, Zambia in 2018, Greece and UK in 2019. In the run up to the 50<sup>th</sup>  
147 anniversary of SEGH in 2021, we will increase from one to two international conferences a year  
148 to be hosted in Eldoret-Kenya and Nanjing-China in 2020, with strong proposals in place for  
149 Portugal and Mexico in 2021. Co-badged meetings will become an increasing feature to improve  
150 engagement with members, with plans in place for 2020 in the USA and Ireland. Future  
151 conferences and meetings will aim to grow interest to attract epidemiologists and health  
152 practitioners in both curative and preventive fields, building on growing topics within SEGH in  
153 nutrition and agricultural research, which are highly relevant to environmental geochemistry and  
154 health.

### 155 **SEGH and the future**

156 SEGH is at a critical point in its history. The competition for memberships to societies is intense  
157 and growing, with financial challenges remaining ever problematic for members. Remaining  
158 relevant to current and future trends in scientific development and policy decisions will initially be  
159 supported by the recent initiatives, such as the ECRs and new geographical hubs with a fresh  
160 ability to review and critique our current position.

161 The multidisciplinary nature and sense of community within SEGH is as highly relevant now as  
162 when it was formed in the early 1970's. SEGH remains an effective platform for members to  
163 exchange ideas within their own field of interest. This has been emphasized in the past by SEGH  
164 membership that as a forum provides a strong and supportive environment (Stewart et al., 2012),  
165 which the board has tried to successfully sustain and grow. Following consultations with  
166 members, SEGH is strengthening efforts to better connect the diverse community that is SEGH,  
167 to encourage new and practical solutions to environmental geochemistry and health challenges  
168 via collaborations. For example, the expansion of SEGH membership into rapidly growing  
169 regions (e.g. Africa, South East Asia) will help SEGH to keep up with emerging research  
170 challenges. Such a move presents an exciting opportunity to increase international collaborations  
171 to tackle increasing environmental pressures from anthropogenic activities (Brown et al., 2019;  
172 Kaninga et al., 2019; Olatunji et al., 2019; Rodgers et al. 2019; Stewart et al., 2019) that have an  
173 impact on human and animal health (Middleton et al., 2019). SEGH presents a platform for  
174 emerging technologies to identify and measure environmental pathways for contaminants via  
175 exposure and hazard assessment, in addition to interests in nutrition through deficiency of  
176 essential nutrients and transfer pathways from soil-to-plant and onward animal/human health  
177 investigations (Watts et al., 2019).

178 SEGH has strengthened initiatives in recent years to draw in epidemiologists/health  
179 professionals; increasing emphasis on emerging contaminants; the role of agriculture and  
180 fisheries in ecological health through to food security. As in the early years of the formation of

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181 SEGH (Wixson and Davies, 2019), SEGH has a role in connecting increasingly complex and  
182 interconnected multidisciplinary studies to better inform stakeholders and policy decision makers.

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### Summary of Future Aspirations

- Improve engagement with epidemiologists and health practitioners (clinical and Public Health) to improve translation of research into policy.
- Achieve greater editorial balance of EGAH geographically and to strengthen the 'Health' component.
- Increase presence of epidemiologists and health practitioners (clinical and Public Health) within the conference programmes.
- Continue to increase regional membership hubs to grow geographical diversity of membership.
- Grow the Early Career Researcher programme for succession management within SEGH and 'stay on trend' with latest research.
- Evolve relevancy of SEGH goals to include the United Nations Strategic Development Goals to reinforce relevance to policy impact
- Increase the membership of business colleagues, in order to encourage research, which is applicable to real-life situations.

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