It is our pleasure to present a new annual issue of Value in Health Regional Issues from the Latin American (LA) region, and a good opportunity to provide our readership with fresh news about the ISPOR 5th LA Conference recently held in Chile. Let us start with the latter, and then get to the former.

ISPOR LA meetings started 8 years ago, with nearly 300 people gathering in Cartagena. In Santiago, there were 940 attendees from 51 countries, reflecting the growing momentum and interest for this field in our region. There were 6 short courses, 38 research podiums, 15 workshops, 10 issue panels, and 392 posters. The two plenaries were aligned with the meeting’s overarching theme, “Increasing Access to Health Care in Latin America: Making Better Decisions for Greater Equity,” and focused on how to improve access to health technologies in Latin America on the basis of methods that are transparent and fairly representative of all stakeholders’ perspectives [1].

The first plenary, “Is HTA [health technology assessment] fair? Analyzing the HTA process in Latin America & its implications for access to health care,” was focused on high-level system objectives (such as efficiency and equity) and principles (transparency, or appeal mechanisms). Stimulating presentations by world experts (Anthony Culyer and Norman Daniels) provided some insights that challenge mainstream ideas such as the one that states that efficiency and equity cannot be both improved, and that there is always a trade-off. They also argued how decisions can be made fairly and represent all stakeholders, while balancing the requirements of a rigorous scientific method to evaluate the usefulness of drugs and devices for their populations [2].

The second plenary was “Access to high-cost drugs in Latin America: Who goes first?” This is an important emerging topic in the region that has been addressed in several developed countries through the creation of specialized programs that established processes that balance equity and efficiency principles according to local jurisdictions. In Latin America, Mexico has implemented coverage for a number of high-cost drugs for which prices are negotiated independently by a special commission created by presidential agreement. However, it represents a hazard that could allow external pressure to play a role in the decision-making process, threatening the rational allocation of resources. In the case of Colombia, multiple health policies have been implemented to face the challenge of financing high-cost drugs, including the creation of an independent body to centrally manage funds across all health care subsystems and the development of legislation and tools to regulate drug prices. Chile has recently tackled the issue of access to high-cost drugs through its public health insurer, the National Health Fund (Fondo Nacional de Salud (FONASA)). This institution implemented a specific program in 2007 to fund drugs for certain rare diseases and other health conditions that require expensive medications, such as breast cancer and rheumatoid arthritis, which have been provided to the population on the basis of restricted patient quotas. In 2015, a law that establishes a new universal fund to cover high-cost drugs has been enacted. Nonetheless, the organizations and mechanisms involved in this task are yet to agree on the procedures and rules that will regulate in practice the provision of these services in the country, which plan to formally incorporate HTA tools and principles [3].

Other regional collaborations strengthening outcome research and HTA are also rather active: some examples are the XIV Iberoamerican Cochrane Network meeting held during May of this year in Uruguay [4], REDETSA’s (regional HTA network) latest annual meeting held in Chile after the ISPOR regional meeting; and the first upcoming LA HTAi policy forum to be held next April [5].

In this issue (volume 8, the fourth issue devoted to LA), we can have an overview of the significant progress our field is making in our region. There are studies from the northern to the southern parts of LA, with several studies from Mexico [6,7] and two from Chile [8,9]. Researchers from Brazil [10–12] and Colombia [13–17] continue to produce several articles, but we also find articles from Guatemala [18] and Uruguay [19]. Three of the studies deal with regional topics and do not deal specifically with a country-specific issue [20–22]. We are publishing not only traditional cost-effectiveness analysis comparing several technologies, the site of administration of the treatment (at home vs hospital management of pneumonia) [9], or an image archiving methodology, but also a budget impact analysis [11], a systematic review [22], and an multicenter study using chart reviews [12]. One study examines epidemiological aspects of malaria in our region, whereas another examines how to estimate dengue-related costs [21]. The scope of topics being evaluated is really interesting: some examples are avoidable mortality [13], inclusion of new drugs into a national benefit package [16], implementation of patient-reported outcomes [20], consequences of chemotherapy wastage [23], equity in access oncological drugs [19], and unexplained variation in cesarean deliveries [17]. One article focuses on children younger than 5 years [14]. In summary, we have a very rich 2015 issue, and we definitely think our readers will have a lot to enjoy.

And, last but not the least, some other issues: 1) we are in the queue for National Library of Medicine PubMed/Medline, to be reviewed in the fall of 2015, for a decision approximately in the

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spring of 2016. We hope we succeed, and this will make our journal much more visible and attractive for researchers; 2) this year we are launching the first Value in Health Regional Issues Excellent Article Award for each region, for articles published in ViHRI from each region biennially; and 3) our journal outreach is steadily increasing in our rather young existence of 3.5 years. Some metrics are the more than 1600 monthly full-text downloads, or the nearly 2300 monthly page views in 2015.

Hope that you enjoy the current issue and the buoyant life of our field in LA, aiming to contribute to the use of sound societal principles for decision making in our region (public and transparent grounds for decisions, relevant reasons, revision mechanisms, and enforcement of the previous three) [24].

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