

SPIER FELLOWS WEEKEND 2017

The 8th Gastro Foundation weekend for fellows weekend from the 27th Jan - 31st Jan 2017, has come and gone but the impact lingers.

I arrived Cape Town earlier on 26th January with a Rwandan fellow, thanks to the ever efficient, Karin and Bini et al and we explored the beautiful Spier Hotel. That evening we were treated to an exotic dinner with the guest speaker, Prof Rogler from Switzerland.

The academic programme got underway the next day, with a welcome address by Dr Chris Kassaindes and immediately got more intense with talks on Faecal transplantation for C. difficile colitis, new horizons in imaging and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques in surveillance of dysplasia all taken by the international guest speaker, Prof Gerhard Rogler. Prof Sandie Thompson, Prof Eduard Jonas, Prof Jose Ramos, Dr Dion Levin, Prof Mark Sonderup and Dr Adam Boutall did justice to the other "Top Tip" topics.

After lunch, there were more sessions all focused on IBD - unusual presentations, optimal therapies and ended with the presentation of an IBD registry developed by Dr Epstein.

There were photograph sessions and then came the much anticipated and exciting team quiz led by Prof Krige and Prof Thompson. There was a lot of team work and good-natured arguments as the South African and visiting fellows were divided into 6 colour coded groups with the consultants randomly joining the groups. We ended the days' activities with dinner on the conference venue terrace.

Saturday was bright with the fellows and faculty participating in a morning run sporting their team colours. This later gave way to the fast paced and challenging small group sessions involving case discussions. The case based discussions were led by the faculty members and gave the fellows insight into evidence based medicine. It was very interactive and this gave the fellows areas of focus to read up later. Then there was Endoscopy quiz anchored by Dr Epstein also taken by the various groups. The Guest Lecture by the daring and interesting Dr Marina Elliot on discovery of "Homo Naledi" was captivating. Thereafter we were treated to a sumptuous dinner at the Eight Restaurant.

On Sunday, the last day of the conference, focus was mostly on procedures such as fibroscan, ultrasound, capsule endoscopy and colonoscopy (on models). It was very practical but time allocated to the colonoscopy session was too short. The conference ended the same day with a motivational talk on Mentorship.

Finally, came the prize-giving sessions which provided an entertaining banter and I daresay my team - the yellow team - was the first overall.

The rest of the programme was at the Groote Schuur Hospital, Capetown from the 30th - 31st January. We joined the Gastropathology conference, as well as the therapeutic Upper GI and Lower GI endoscopic procedures being done by South African fellows. We also went to the

ERCP and capsule Endoscopy rooms and had tutorials on these procedures. We later joined Dr Gill Watermeyer at the IBD clinic and reviewed some patients.

The next day we attended the hepatobiliary meeting, visited the liver transplantation clinic and participated in case based presentations and discussions.

It was not just academics as I met seven amazing fellows from sub-Saharan Africa- Joshua (Ghana), Menelas (Rwanda), Ismail (Mozambique), Abdulsemed (Ethiopia), Shabbir(Kenya), Masolwa (Tanzania) and Sepo Sepo (Cameroon). We formed a network- The sub-Saharan African Group or The United States of Africa (USA). There was a lot of networking and a bond formed within ourselves and with the good- natured fellows at the Groote Schuur Hospital.

We visited tourists sites like the Table Mountain, Victoria Waterfront, the Signal Hill and the Rhodes Memorial, and Victor from Medtronic took us Hout Bay.

Everyone was friendly and eager to teach; from the fellows to the consultants and they were keen on collaborating with the sub-Saharan African group especially in areas of research .

We the sub-Saharan African group have been afforded a truly unique experience and during one of our chitchat sessions with Prof Thompson he said, “we can only train but we cannot get involved in the politics in your various countries, you have to go back and make the difference”. This we intend to do as more solid foundation has been laid on which to build a career as future gastroenterologists. Special thanks to the Gastrofoundation of South Africa and all the sponsors for their immense investment in the fellows programme.

DANKIE.....Ngiyabonga

Chinwe Onyia Philomena

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