

Celebrating 10 years of Gastro Foundation Fellows meetings

On the 1st of February, a pristine day at Spier in the Cape ushered in the 10th annual Gastro Foundation Fellows meeting. The preceding meetings promised and delivered not only invaluable academic preparation for fellows sitting for the exit exams in various fields of gastroenterology, but the opportunity to network and form enduring friendships. This meeting would prove no different.

Early flights brought in groups from different provinces of the country, and from abroad, to join a strong contingency of local professionals, all of whom would form the largest group of fellows ever to meet at a Gastro Foundation meeting. Prof Chris Kassianides, chairman and founding member of the Gastroenterology Foundation of Sub-Saharan Africa, warmly welcomed us all. Academic talks immediately got underway, kicked off with an insightful talk on oesophageal foreign bodies and chemical burns by Prof Rogler, visiting lecturer from Switzerland.

This was followed by concise and current updates on important topics such as dysphagia, pancreatic cysts, H. Pylori, inflammatory bowel disease, neuroendocrine tumours, primary sclerosing cholangitis, chronic pancreatitis and the polyposis syndromes by prominent academic clinicians in the field.

The fellows being split into 2 large groups, medical gastroenterology fellows with colorectal surgeons in the one, and hepatobiliary with upper gastrointestinal surgeons in the other, followed lunch. Parallel interactive sessions were held, with each fellow provided the opportunity to be tested on, and to contribute to the clinical cases being presented.

The last session of the day saw the introduction of a critical component of a comprehensive gastroenterology service, in the form of a lecture provided by Prof Jean Botha on liver transplantation. This would be the first meet where transplantation was represented by both faculty and fellow (myself). The talk focused on the role of transplantation in the management of end-stage liver disease and malignancy, with insight given into what has already been achieved within South Africa over the last decade in transplantation.

The much-anticipated pre-dinner fellows quiz, hosted by Prof Sandie Thomson and Prof Jake Krige rounded off the first day. Their energetic and enthusiastic presentation of questions (and penalties for offences!) truly broke the ice and set the tone for team building and bonding within teams. Congratulations Orange team!

Saturday morning started off with the traditional early morning walk/run, attended by a large contingency of fellows and faculty. Following a refresher quiz on endoscopy findings and management, the entire group of fellows were split into their smaller teams, the objective of the day being in-depth discussions around 6 core cases (bases), relevant to the team's specialty. As the sole transplant fellow, I found myself within the surgical hepatobiliary team. Bases here centered around liver resection for malignancy, pancreatic lesions and acute pancreatitis,

which provided a great opportunity for revision and getting up to speed with current developments.

Two talks given by invited speakers ended off a full day of productive learning. The first was an enlightening talk by Dr JP Landman, who shed some light on South Africa's socio-political stance and evolution, followed by Dr Mayaki who in turn provided insight into future developments on the African continent as a whole. Dinner followed at the Eight restaurant and many (myself certainly included) used this rare occasion to let one's hair down and celebrate with old and many new friends.

The last morning of the meeting saw interesting talks on peri-operative management of patients with inflammatory bowel disease and re-feeding syndrome. Also included in the morning's proceedings was a talk on mentorship-being mentored and being a mentor. Prof Botha shared some of his journey in transplantation and the people who provided guidance and support along the way.

The meeting was concluded by Prof Kassianides giving thanks and prize giving, each team being acknowledged in a different way.

The 10th Gastro Fellows meeting provided a rare opportunity for specialists in different fields within the discipline of gastroenterology to meet learn and have fun together. It is on these sorts of occasions that enduring friendships are forged; collaborations, which ultimately serve patients best and provide invaluable support to professionals in this challenging field.

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