

Spier Fellows Weekend 5 -7 February 2016

The seventh annual Gastroenterology Foundation Fellows Weekend – a fun and interactive event focusing on the development of the future gastroenterologists – returned to Spier Wine Farm from 5 to 7 February 2016. As a first time attendee I was excited to see what this very unique training event entailed. Senior colleagues had advised me that it would be an academically taxing but thoroughly enjoyable experience and it definitely lived up to that.

The gloriously warm weather was the perfect complement to the breathtaking setting Stellenbosch has to offer. The social experience of what the weekend was about to offer kicked off immediately upon disembarking the plane, as the Johannesburg fellows met their Durban counterparts and catch up sessions got underway.

On arrival at the Spier Hotel and Conference Facility we partook in a light lunch and had the opportunity to meet more of our compatriots from across the country and even some from beyond our borders, including Nigeria and Ethiopia. This year was the largest gathering to date - 36 fellows and 22 faculty members.

The academic program got underway with engaging talks regarding IBD/PSC by the international guest speaker Dr Cathryn Edwards from Torbay, UK, Dr David Epstein and Prof Wendy Spearman. Prof Eduard Jonas provided an informative overview of the new treatment modalities in HCC. The much anticipated and now legendary team quiz was led by Prof Krige and Prof Thompson. Much good natured arguments and boisterous fun was held by all.

Saturday started bright and early with fellows and faculty participating in a morning run/walk sporting their team colours. This served to invigorate the mind for what was the most challenging component of the weekend - the small group sessions involving case discussions. The case discussions were led by faculty members and provided an excellent platform for interactive and evidence based learning. This format encouraged the fellows to drive their own learning and exposed deficiencies that we should be working on to improve in the coming year. The days proceedings was drawn to a close by Justice Richard Goldstone who gave an enlightening firsthand account of his experiences and opinions of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and of his interactions with the late President Mandela. The Q &A session thereafter an invaluable opportunity to discuss the current political and social environment South Africa finds itself in.

Saturday night's revelry consisted of a wine tasting session held by De Morgenzon and a sumptuous dinner held at the renowned Eight restaurant.

The "Top Tip" sessions held on Sunday were superb at highlighting certain commonly encountered topics and take home points. This was followed by an interactive ultrasonography session led by radiologists regarding basics that we as clinicians should

familiarise ourselves with. Finally, the prize giving sessions for the top performing team and individuals provided some entertaining banter.

We as Gastroenterology fellows in South Africa, and now Africa as a whole, are afforded a truly unique opportunity in the form of this weekend. The insights gained, friends made and bonds formed provide a significant foundation on which to build a career as a future gastroenterologist. A special thank you to the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa for continuing to foster interest and investment in the fellows. Thanks also go to the sponsors - Janssen, Takeda and Abbvie.

Reena Kara

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