



The Ghana Meeting: a melting pot of academic excellence, a vibrant and generous people with an illustrious history



I was fortunate to be one of the international faculty members to attend and present at the 1st Scientific Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Ghana Association for the Study of Liver and Digestive Diseases, with the catchy acronym, GASLIDD. Other faculty members in attendance were Profs Reid Ally, Wendy Spearman (both from South Africa) and Fatimah Abdulkareem (Nigeria). There was also representation from the president of the Africa-Middle East Association of Gastroenterology (AMAGE) Professor Olusegun Ojo and Dr. Olufunmilayo Lesi who is the director, WGO Lagos

Training Center, both of whom gave talks.

Our travel arrangements were smooth thanks to the excellent organization (which we have become accustomed to) from Bini and her team. The only omission by Bini and co. is that they neglected to set Wendy's and my watch two hours behind; the result was that both of us presented ourselves at the hotel reception in Accra (after an overnight stay) to be picked up for a shuttle ride to the airport, for travel to Kumasi at 3 am instead of 5 am. So we had to drag our luggage back up to our rooms, only to repeat the exercise two hours later. How typical!

A pre-conference programme preceded the meeting, which by all accounts, was well organized and executed. We arrived in Kumasi on Thursday morning, in time for the actual conference, which kicked off with abstract presentations. It has to be said that the quality of the work presented was excellent. It is admirable that our Ghanaian colleagues are able to produce this high standard of work, despite describing themselves as 'resource-poor', lending credence to the fact that money truly is not everything, at least as far as I'm concerned. Following the abstracts were the plenary sessions, where a variety of gastroenterology and hepatology talks presented by the Ghanaian and international faculty members. What came out strongly from the discussions was that indeed hepatitis B and hepatocellular carcinoma are a plague in West Africa, and pose similar management and logistical challenges to those we face here in South Africa. This for me emphasizes the urgent need for epidemiological and molecular study in this area. Specifically, we need to combine our efforts and collaborate on these key issues, in order to effect an understanding of HBV in our patients, which as we know is different phenotypically from patients in developed nations. This will allow us to formulate investigation and treatment guidelines that can impact on HBV in our setting. The fellows' session, similar in format to that conducted at the Spier weekend, where clinical cases were presented generated much provoking and insightful discussion. Furthermore, rather than run in parallel, as originally planned, we conducted these concurrently with Train the Trainer (TTT) sessions, which made sense for both the fellows and faculty alike, in

terms of the ability to interact with each other and share ideas from both sides. Arguably, this session was the one to beat, from the feedback received. The sessions on Friday were equally interesting and instructive, but for me the highlight was the opening ceremony, which was a star-studded dignitary affair. I quite enjoyed the formalities, which were heralded by the singing of the national anthem. The welcome address was done by Dr Nkrumah, who to my mind, based on what I heard and my own observations, is the grandfather of gastroenterology in Ghana, much like our own beloved Prof Solly Marks. To me he represents true class, full stop. The guest lecture was delivered by Prof Lewis Roberts (himself a Ghanaian) which was quite fitting, who is currently based at the Mayo Clinic. He gave a philosophical but thought provoking lecture on building gastroenterology in Ghana.

Apart from an inspired and enjoyable academic program that was of the highest quality, we were also very well looked after. Dr Mary Afihene, who is the newly sworn-in President of GASLIDD, (congratulations Mary), arranged for us to be taken on a couple tours. The first one, which took place at the end of the academic programme on the first day was a visit to the Kumasi Fort and Military Museum, where we were literally blown away, forgive the pun, by the rich history of the Ashanti people and the might of the “Golden Stool”. It has been many years since a visit to a museum in any place has stirred such emotion in me, as such I would encourage any visitor to Ghana to visit this museum. In addition we were taken on a tour of Manhyia Palace and the hospital. The Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH is worthy of mention. It is a tertiary institution, the largest in the Ashanti region, with over 1000 beds. The building is modern and wonderfully spacious on the inside, with a courtyard and beautiful gardens. For a hospital it was strangely inviting, a far cry from the concrete eyesore, that is my place of work.

On the final evening of our visit, was the Gala Dinner, which was really enjoyable, and concluded by a performance by a choir of professionals, who sang classical and traditional folk songs. I must say, the cherry on top was seeing Reid and Wendy bust out in their dance moves. Who knew they had it in them?

Finally, I have been to many meetings and the Ghana meeting ranks amongst one of my favourites. I simply had a blast; it must have something to do with the generosity of spirit of the Ghana people. And the fact that they put together a well-attended world-class inaugural meeting is indeed noteworthy. I am grateful to the Gastroenterology Foundation for inviting me to be part of this memorable meeting. I wish to congratulate GASLIDD and wish them many more triumphs going forward.

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