

9th Liver Interest Group Annual Meeting

On a beautiful Saturday morning, I made my way to the Radisson Blu Gautrain hotel in Sandton for the 9th annual liver interest meeting. After a quick cup of coffee to catch up with colleagues, we made our way into the modern and stylish conference centre to begin the talks of the day.

After an enthusiastic welcome by Prof Kassianides, we focused our attention on the first talk given by Prof Spearman who many endearingly refer to as the Queen of Hepatology! She spoke about creating academic hubs in order to do virtual rounds with primary health care teams. What an innovative concept! It will certainly be educational for primary care physicians and of course will ensure that patients get access to specialist care. I wondered if I might be allowed to sign up? I often have hepatology cases that leave me riddled with questions!

Following the opening talk Prof Jonas gave us an overview on Hepatocellular cancer surveillance in Sub Saharan Africa. He gave the audience some tips on the most cost effective ways to adequately screen our population and encouraged the gastroenterologists to delve more into research in this field. This was followed by a talk by Prof Sonderup who gave us an insightful overview of HIV and the liver, an all too common condition in our setting.

Each session was concluded by a 'comfort break' which I thought was excellent as it gave everyone just enough time to stretch your legs, grab a quick cup of coffee/tea and quickly devour a scrumptious snack before the next session.

The mid-morning sessions were different in that they had presentations by our esteemed international speakers followed by relevant case presentations presented by three of the fellows, and one challenging case presented by Dr Gogela from Cape Town. Each case was followed by a histopathology presentation to review the cases presented. I thought this format was really helpful in understanding how to merge the relevant theory with clinical situations that we often have to manage.

The first international speaker was Prof Tom Hemming Karlsen from the University of Oslo in Norway. He gave us a talk on autoimmune and cholestatic diseases of the liver which had me furiously scribbling notes! He incorporated his experience with patients and the latest research very well and it made for a thoroughly interesting talk. The second international speaker was Prof Massimo Pinzani from University College in London. He spoke about pathophysiology, screening and treatment of

portal hypertension in end stage liver disease. After the two case presentations, we made our way to the restaurant for lunch. We basked in the sunshine while thoroughly enjoying the tasty meal!

The sessions after lunch are always a challenge due to a full satisfied stomach! However, thankfully all the speakers were discussing important topics that piqued ones' interest. Starting from the importance of nutrition in the cirrhotic patient, to whether or not patients with hepatic encephalopathy should be allowed to drive.

The last session was pertaining to issues regarding liver transplant. Prof Botha discussed liver transplant as an oncologic cure, which is something that I am sure will give hope to hundreds of suffering oncology patients. Of course, this wouldn't be possible if there were no donors/organs available, nor if there were no dedicated and skilled surgeons to acquire the liver. Prof Loveland gave us a brief overview of how the living donor programme works and how grafts are selected. For those of us who aren't lucky enough to work in a transplant unit this was both fascinating and encouraging to hear about.

The very last talk was by Dr Etheredge regarding the ethics of HIV to non-HIV liver transplantation. To be frank, I usually find the ethics talks a little dull and I struggle to remain focussed however this ethical talk was based on a clinical case where the liver of a mother with HIV was transplanted into her HIV negative child. A first of its kind in South Africa! We were delighted to hear that both mother and child are doing well and this study, I'm sure, will pioneer the management of many such patients hereafter.

On that high note, we left the liver interest meeting after a quick vote of thanks by Dr Bobat. I drove home to Pretoria with some innovative ideas, insightful information and wishing we had more of these meetings!

Thank you so much to Dr Bobat especially, for organising everything so well and particularly for allowing me the opportunity to share the podium with some of the greats of Hepatology! It was nerve wracking, but it was also such a great honour! Thank you also to all the sponsors (Equity, Ferring and Gilead), to everyone who put the meeting together, and most importantly to the Gastro Foundation, truly a job well done! See you next year!

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Left to right: Tom Hemming Karlsen, Wendy Spearman, Massimo Pinzani, Chris Kassianides, Mashiko Setshedi, Bilal Bobat, Jean Botha, Eduard Jonas

