

AASLD – GHASSA CONNECT MEETING

The GHASSA (previously GFSA) sponsored Liver meetings embedded into SAGES have been successful. Starting in Durban, in 2015, where EASL partnered to start a series of “Best of EASL” meetings. These were very well received and have expanded into sub Saharan Africa. The foundation of the meetings are based on selected talks from the preceding EASL meeting postgraduate course.

In 2018, AASLD embarked on its Connect meetings as part of its Global Outreach Policy. The first meeting was held in Accra, Ghana, was well received and well attended. AASLD run the Connect Meetings as both an opportunity to provide ongoing postgraduate education but also to interact with researchers and establish working partnerships. Given this policy direction of AASLD, it was decided that their second Connect meeting in Africa would be in Cape Town at SAGES 2019. Preparation and work on the meeting started in November 2018. The programme agenda was developed over a lengthy period of time and was chosen to include didactic, interactive as well as “Meet the Professor” style luncheon sessions.

Much hard work and preparation culminated in the AASLD Connect meeting on August 17th. From AASLD, faculty included Professors’ Gyongyi Szabo, Ray Kim, Lewis Roberts, Kymberly Watt. Joining them was Jay Hoofnagle, as part of his Solly Marks visit. The programme was nuanced to have 2 distinct sessions – the morning being more medically hepatology focused the afternoon, surgical hepatology focused. This contributed to the excellent attendance by both hepatologists/gastroenterologists as well as surgical gastroenterologists/hepatobiliary surgeons in addition to transplant surgeons.

Jay Hoofnagle provided a comprehensive overview of hepatitis B reactivation with immunosuppressive therapy with Kym Watt tackling complications of cirrhosis. Gyongyi Szabo looked at acute liver failure and Ray Kim provided a superb review of current and future directions for hepatitis B therapy. An audience interactive case panel discussion, with Bilal Bobat leading the case, ended the morning session. Lunchtime meet the Professor sessions were very well supported and is certainly a format to be explored again at future meetings. The afternoon session, being surgically focused, looked at the approach to masses in the liver by Lewis Roberts and an African perspective on HCC by Eduard Jonas. Marc Bernon tackled ablation versus resection versus transplant for HCC. John Devar looked at the dominant stricture in PSC with Lewis again focusing on cholangiocarcinoma. Jean Botha finished off with transplant for tumours other than HCC in the liver.

The day was comprehensive, interactive and well received with very positive critique. The first AASLD Connect meeting in South Africa, and second for Africa, was a uniquely positive experience. Our American guests had much time to socially interact with local colleagues so as to forge new partnerships and friendships. We are grateful to AASLD for their time and generosity and to GHASSA for its ongoing support of education and forging new partnerships across the world.

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