

## **The IBD Interest Group Meeting 2021**

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The Gastroenterology Foundation of Sub-Saharan Africa hosted the annual IBD Interest Group meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2021 and was held in the heart of the Johannesburg business district in Sandton at the Radisson Blu Gautrain Hotel.

Due to the COVID pandemic, most conferences have been held online – however the IBD meeting was a hybrid meeting, allowing both a face- to face meeting in addition to the the option of logging on virtually.

The atmosphere at the venue was one of excitement. Upon entering the conference, COVID protocols and social distancing measures were followed & attendees were eager to reunite with familiar faces and colleagues after an extended period of time apart.

The program kicked off with a warm welcome and opening address from Prof Chris Kassianides who gave us an insight into the past, present and future activities of the Gastro Foundation of SSA. We were reintroduced to the GHASSA (Gastroenterology and Hepatology Association of SSA) network, the virtual teaching programs through GECHO association as well as the partnership with AU Nepad. He also highlighted the international publications and achievements obtained this year – and this left me and many audience members highly inspired!

The first presentation was by Prof Rupert Leong who spoke to us virtually from Sydney, Australia. His list of accolades and accomplishments are innumerable. He gave us a lecture on “Small Bowel Crohn’s Disease” pertaining to risk factors, morbidity and late diagnosis, investigations including radiology such as small bowel ultrasound- which is of key interest currently and which the Foundation plans to pursue – as well as management options with the latest trials and data related to Crohn’s Disease.

This was followed by Dr Didintle Mokgoko with “a case of de novo IBD post liver transplant”. This important case beautifully integrated IBD and liver transplant medicine with many ‘clinical pearls’ obtained from her presentation.

Dr Daniel Surridge, a colo – rectal surgeon gave an overview of stomas and IBD, highlighting the importance of counselling our IBD patients from the start regarding surgery, and not leaving surgery is the “last resort”.

At this point in the morning everybody was ready for some food and refreshments and a delicious brunch was served.

Session 2 began with Dr Seabi from Charlotte Maxeke and Prof Ally from Baragwanath hospital chairing and with Prof Rupert Leong returned and spoke to us about the microbiome and ulcerative colitis. This informative talk sparked a lot of debate regarding faecal transplantation (FMT).

Dr Catherine Gouden from UKZN then presented virtually with thought provoking insights into HIV and IBD, a topic is particularly important in our African context. She analyzed the overlap of the two diseases and the implications on disease course and management strategies.

We were then privileged to have a talk by Prof Gill Watermeyer on the “Oral targeted IBD therapies in 2021”. Copious notes were taken during this lecture to absorb the intricacies of the information about the drugs being discussed since the first oral targeted medication for UC - Tofacitinib - just been registered in SA. We do hope to see more of these medications being available to the greater public, in sub-Saharan Africa in the future.

We ended off the day with a case presentation by Dr Marc Ostrofsky, who presented a case of “paradoxical psoriasis”, in a young lady with Crohn’s disease being treated with infliximab. He included immunological aspects as well as a thorough approach to this manifestation, which is not uncommon.

The meeting then drew to a close and we were left brimming with new outlooks on aspects of the management of patients with IBD and the knowledge that would help us in our day to day clinical practice going forward. In addition seeing our colleagues, after a long hiatus, added to this very successful IBD meeting.

Thank you to the Gastroenterology Foundation of Sub-Saharan Africa, to Prof Kassianides and to the organizing committee -Bini Seale, Juliet Desilla and team.