

Gastro Foundation Liver Interest Group

The Annual Liver Interest group meeting was held in Cape Town in its usual slot over the last weekend of November 2019. The focus of the Gastroenterology Hepatology Association of Sub Saharan Africa (GHASSA) has been on Viral Hepatitis elimination and by consequence Hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC) awareness.

The theme of this year's meeting continued on that note with an update on political matters aimed at eradicating Viral Hepatitis from Mark Sonderup. Policy is gradually shifting with more African leaders recognizing the importance of Viral Hepatitis as a contributor to morbidity and mortality in their countries. This has been notable in Egypt with one of the world's largest hepatitis C treatment programme, used to further and accrue other health benefits in that country.

Fortuitously we were in luck to have Professor Harry Dalton visiting from the UK. Prof Dalton is an international expert on Hepatitis E and was a welcome inclusion into the programme shining a spotlight on a virus that is often forgotten about in the South African context despite our neighboring countries having occasional outbreaks.

One of our most eminent scientists, Professor Anna Kramvis expanded upon why sub-Saharan Africa is so afflicted by the burden of HCC with Prof Eduard Jonas contextualizing why it is so difficult to manage once it has been diagnosed; often late and at an advanced stage, afflicting young people in their prime.

One of the issues affecting widespread screening is the lack of available resources. This then provided an appropriate segue into the after brunch session where we had a focus on Point of Care Ultrasound (POCUS) and its utility for the GI/Hepatologist/Surgeon.

POCUS is a rapidly evolving medical field currently being led by our emergency medicine colleagues. Just as it took many years for Laenec to have the stethoscope catch on as an invaluable piece of medical equipment, POCUS has had a slow birth. Luckily in the modern age, with technology rapidly improving and devices becoming smaller and smaller, it is becoming more a physician choice to pick up the skill rather than a technology burden that is the main barrier.

Our International guest, Dr Matteo Rosselli, completed his medical training in Florence Medical University before moving to London and taking up a post at the Institute for Liver and Digestive Health at University College London, Royal Free Hospital. Whilst there, Dr Rosselli championed the use of point of care ultrasound in Hepatology and has been at the forefront of using novel technologies to answer clinical questions at the bedside. Dr Rosselli introduced the concept of Contrast enhanced ultrasonography as a tool for screening HCC. Dr Elizabeth Joekes who joined us via ZOOM from London and has established Worldwide Radiology, an international NGO aiming to increase diagnostic imaging capacity in resource limited settings, provided further proof of concept that Contrast Enhanced sonography was a viable modality for us to consider moving forward to assist in the early recognition of HCC in sub Saharan Africa. Newer devices also allow for the implementation for an ECHO model, something that is already established in sub-Saharan Africa.

The day was closed with a panel discussion including Prof Landon Myer from the school of Public Health who was able to give us insights into the HIV/AIDS fight and how we can win similar battles in the viral hepatitis sphere. We certainly have a challenge ahead of us.

As always the team of Karin Fenton and Bini Seale were outstanding in putting together a meeting that went off without a hitch despite additional technology and teleconferencing requirements and credit must go to them and the Vineyard Hotel team for always making these events such successes.

Thanks to the sponsors Ferring, Gilead and Medtronic for making the meeting possible.

Bilal Bobat