

GASTROENTEROLOGY FOUNDATION



The World Endoscopy Organisation (WEO) session at SAGES Virtual is the current endeavour of the Gastro Foundation to support gastroenterology in South Africa and in the SSA. This liaison was brought about by connections between Dua Kulwinder of the WEO and Chris Kassianides of the Gastro Foundation of SSA.

There is increasing recognition by the worlds organisations and gastroenterology associations from High Income Countries that the upliftment of gastroenterology in Africa is much needed and that networks built up by individuals from SAGES and the Gastro Foundation are the key to developing lasting educational activities.

The selections of talks from their WEO World Congress held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, I believe provided an insight into what is current in the field of endoscopy. Lars Aabakken set the scene for the WEO outreach program and his own involvement in their activities in Africa, in particular Ethiopia. Their president Fabian Emura addressed the topic of systematic photo-documentation which highlighted definitions and the absolute need for all endoscopists to be doing this. I do not believe it's outside the capabilities of even resource limited endoscopy settings as technology simplifies this task. In a later session President Emura with Dr Sharma focused again on upper endoscopy in relation to definitions regarding reflux disease. They highlighted the consensus definitions so that there is consistency in applying them to clinical and research practice.

The WEO past President Jean Francois Rey took on the challenge of presenting the current and future prospects of artificial intelligence (AI) in aiding the detection of malignant and premalignant conditions in the gastrointestinal tract. This has occurred because of the improvements in the optical characteristics of the modern endoscopes and capsules. High definition video, zoom, and virtual chromo-endoscopy have provided more accuracy in defining malignancy risk to the naked eye of experts. AI takes their characterisation and uses it to increase the accuracy of the prediction and provide much improved prevention and therapeutic strategies for GI cancers. Dr Dekker highlighted just where we are with the use of virtual chromoendoscopy and how she has incorporated it into her clinical practice. She highlighted the need for better evidence on which to base its efficacy also alluding to how it may be incorporated into AI.

The session on pancreatico-biliary endoscopy gave perspectives invaluable to the trainee on the ins and outs of EUS and ERCP biopsy techniques. There is no doubt, as these techniques become more refined, that there is will be a need to monitor the yield in our local scene. Cystic pancreatic neoplasms are an area where surgical and medical gastroenterology are integral parts of the multidisciplinary team. Douglas Faigel gave us an understanding on how endoscopy aids in the

diagnosis and helps with the tailoring of any surgery required.

I really enjoyed the last session which included contrasting but highly relevant talks on the colorectal cancer (CRC). Paul Goldberg updated us on the Lynch Syndrome Cohort from the Northern Cape - an ideal model for colonoscopic surveillance with proven benefit. This programme has been extended to incorporate screening for other cancers associated with the syndrome. This was followed by Professor Joseph Sung for Hong Kong, well known to the South African Community, who gave an outstanding talk on the epidemiology of CRC and the current concepts in CRC screening, including the FIT test and colonoscopy. This was paired with excellent practical guidance on cold snare polypectomy for non-stalked polyps under one cm. It is clear that this is the method of choice to do a safe and full excision. Small thin snares are the secret of success.

All in all there was a good spectrum of topics across all the endoscopy domains and worthy to consider repeating in future congresses, virtual or otherwise.

The WEO co-operation with the Gastro Foundation of SSA is set to continue with a series of short talks as part of the GECHO gastrointestinal and hepatology outreach series which is scheduled to dovetail with Liver ECHO and IBD every Thursday afternoon. This cooperation can only strengthen the quality and sustain our interaction with our colleagues in sub Saharan Africa.

Sandie Thomson



Prof Fabian Emura of WEO

