

Spier Fellows Weekend 2-4 February 2018

For the 9th annual Gastroenterology Foundation Fellows Weekend, 40 fellows and 27 faculty descended upon the Spier Conference Centre 2-4 February 2018. As a visiting medical GI fellow at Groote Schuur from Brown University in the United States, I was fortunate to be included on the Spier roster this year. When I received the invitation, I had no way of knowing it would become the highlight of my month in South Africa.

Following introductory comments from Professor Sandie Thomson and Dr. Chris Kassianides Friday morning, we jumped right into the educational activities. The organizers had curated a series of pre-recorded UEG (United European Gastroenterology) lectures and endoscopy videos to share with us. This proved to be an effective use of technology to mitigate the vast physical distance between the eager audience at Spier and European experts on topics like *Helicobacter pylori* and advanced endoscopic procedures in the elderly. Professor Eduard Jonas closed the morning session with an update on epidemiology and treatment of hepatocellular carcinoma, with emphasis on patients in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The second half of the day offered parallel sessions on colonoscopy and hepatobiliary (HPB) topics. In the HPB session, additional hand-selected UEG procedural videos were shown, with opportunities for questions from fellows and commentary from an expert faculty panel. The colonoscopy session featured a series of short didactic talks with a balance of evidence-based and practical advice from experienced consultants.

Friday's crowning event was the Team Quiz, which Professors Thomson and Krige hosted with infectious enthusiasm. The quiz provided an opportunity to build a foundation of team spirit that would last the entire weekend and set the stage for comfortable, interactive small group sessions the following day.

As per tradition, Saturday kicked off with a five kilometer run around the Spier Estate to supply us with plenty of endorphins for the full day ahead. After breakfast, we proceeded with our teams through case-based stations manned by engaging and knowledgeable faculty.

Professor Tim Noakes gave two talks as this year's guest speaker. The first, on Saturday night, was titled "What makes a champion", about the power of self-belief and the hazards of self-imposed limitations. It was an excellent segway to Sunday morning's talk, "Growing academic champions", during which he described the importance of quality coaching, easily extrapolated to mentorship in academic medicine. His words were poignant as many of us near the end of our formal training. We have already chosen our subspeciality, and now we must decide what type of leaders and mentors we want to be as we move to the next stage of our lives. Noakes' lecture encouraged important reflection on this topic, as we sat amongst our own role models and mentors.

The morning continued with hands-on simulator stations for ERCP, Fibroscan, Colonoscopy, RFA, and esophageal motility. These were followed by prizes (congratulations, Blue Team!) and an interactive feedback session. This was a unique program with the educational needs of medical and surgical GI fellows as the main focus, rather than as an afterthought. Anyone interested in how to “grow academic champions” needs to look no further than the annual weekend the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa has put together for its fellows. My deepest gratitude goes to Professor Wendy Spearman for making my time at Groote Schuur Hospital and at Spier possible!

Yesenia Greeff, MD
GastroenterologyFellow
Brown University, USA

Thank you to the faculty and the supportive trade making this postgrad training possible.

Cipla, Medtronic, Olympus, Sandoz, Surgical Innovations, Takeda