

12th Gastro Foundation Weekend for Fellows: 3 - 5 September 2021

I was fortunate enough to attend my third Spier Fellows weekend this September. Prior to the weekend, many questions ran through my mind: “what about covid?”, “how will a socially-distanced conference be successful”, “usually its held in summer, so will I freeze to death on the morning run?” and “did the junior fellows even RSVP to the event?”. Despite much questioning and scepticism, I was proven wrong, the weekend was a great success as always, with fellows travelling from all over the country to attend. Furthermore, virtual platforms allowed for live streaming of the lectures to those who could not be present in person.

The programme kicked off on Friday morning with a much-needed practical session on upskilling in colonoscopy. This was followed by a general session covering various topics. It was attended by fellows from colorectal, HPB and upper GI surgery, as well as medical gastroenterology. This highlighted the overlap in our various disciplines and the need for a maintained multi-disciplinary network.

Prof Thomson and Prof Krige’s annual quiz brought out the competitive side of the fellows and faculty, with a first-place tie between colorectal and medical GI. The evening closed after supper with an early night for some, and a late night for others!

The beauty of Spier Estate could only really be appreciated on the icy-cold Saturday morning run. Runners included early night-ers, some late night-ers, and even some HODs, of which one went as far as borrowing shoes from the Hotel in order to make an appearance.

After the run and a buffet breakfast, the fellows separated into smaller teams for focused, case-based teaching. It was a great learning experience, where knowledge was revised, learnt, and applied. Not only were these sessions quintessential for the upcoming exams but they helped with shaping future specialist surgeons and gastrointestinal physicians.

The day closed with exciting talks by two guest speakers. Prof Aggrey Ambali highlighted the Gastro Foundation AU NEPAD Collaboration, and Brank Brkic, editor of the Daily Maverick, brought an enthralling political discussion to the table.

Sunday morning, the final morning, remained action packed with an endoscopy quiz followed by a radiology masterclass. The courses addressed both basic and advanced aspects of the practical nature of our training.

As the programme drew to a close, I still had one question: “what now?”. After 12 years, this weekend was the last Spier Fellows Weekend held at the Spier Estate. The end of an era. With this closure, however, came excitement for new horizons. Not only will there be a new location to look forward too, but new training prospects have come into play. A goal has been set to improve training overall by establishing a national GI virtual-medicine training programme. The new year will be an exciting time for current and future trainees.

In closing, on behalf of all the fellows, immense gratitude goes to the Gastro Foundation and a special thank you to Prof Kassianides and the faculty, Karin (who we missed tremendously), Bini and Cheryl. Until next time...

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