

# Report on the 5th LIVER INTEREST GROUP Annual Meeting

The meeting was organized by the *Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa* and was held in Cape Town on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2014

Title of the meeting: VIRAL HEPATITIS IN AFRICA

The outstanding feature of this meeting was the fact that it was the first occasion on which hepatologists/gastroenterologists from elsewhere in Africa attended and took an active part in the meeting. It has long been apparent that the future of Hepatology/Gastroenterology in Africa would depend upon an active interaction and collaboration between experts in these fields from all parts of the continent, and this was confirmed at this meeting. The populations of the African continent are beset by numerous illnesses, many of which have their highest incidences in, or are unique to, the continent. The solution to these problems will require a close interaction between experts from all parts of the Africa, a fact that was clearly demonstrated during the discussion periods of the meeting.

Of the several important and interesting topics that were well covered in the meeting, two were of particular immediate concern. The first concerned the extremely depressing fact that universal immunization of babies against hepatitis B virus infection in South Africa is still not being administered in best available way, and the result is that only 70% of Black African babies are being fully protected against infection with this virus and the resulting extremely serious sequelae.

In her presentation, Wendy Spearman stressed the observation that the delay in administering the first dose of the vaccine (and therefore also the second and third doses) is largely responsible for the fact that a significant number of Black African babies remain at risk of the very real danger of being infected with hepatitis B virus during childhood (or to a lesser extent in adulthood) and therefore prone to developing the extremely serious consequences of infection with this virus later in life. Many attempts have, in the past, been made, to no avail, to persuade the South African Government to change to the very early administration of the vaccine used by virtually all other populations at high risk of this infection.

The other subject of that was of particular importance in the meeting was the presentation by Mark Sonderup on the up-to-date treatment of hepatitis C virus infection. This is a subject of great significance because of the tremendous progress that has recently been made in treating this viral infection. The serious consequences of chronic infection with this virus and the very poor results of its treatment hitherto tried are well known, so the outstanding results now being obtained with the new generation drugs is a reason for celebration.

In addition, excellent presentations were given on a number of other aspects of hepatitis viral infections occurring in Africa. The opportunity was taken in the discussion period to emphasise the importance of a multi-African countries endeavour to handle the many hepatitis viral infections that still beset the populations of Africa.