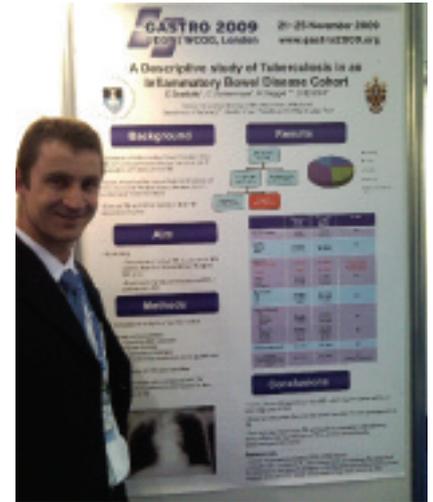




21-25 November 2009
www.gastro2009.org

Gastro 2009 and the Young Clinicians Program



It was when Chris Hawkey, President of the BSG, played Solomon Linda's "The lion sleeps tonight" that I felt proudly South African and strangely at home. However this wasn't home at all. I was in fact very far from home, seated in the Bull Hotel, in Gerrard's Cross, opposite a fellow gastroenterology trainee from Mongolia. Seated next to me, was my friend and colleague Lydia Cairncross, the only other South African in the room. Professor Hawkey was entertaining us with his selection of "national theme songs" during a social event on the last day of the Young Clinicians Program (YCP). We had already learnt and experienced so much and the following day we would depart for London to attend Gastro 2009.

In November 2009 I was privileged to attend an extended training program which coincided with the Gastro 2009 congress. This unique opportunity was developed as a joint organisational venture between the host societies of Gastro 2009 (UEGW, WGO, OMED, and BSG), and the Association of National European and Mediterranean Societies of Gastroenterology (ASNEMGE). It consisted of 3 parts, a two day taster visit to a local gastroenterology unit, followed by the YCP and ended with Gastro 2009 in London.

The taster visit was held at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield. This unit has a great interest in the field of intestinal failure and small bowel imaging. Mark McAlindon, who hosted me graciously, provided me with basic training in the use of capsule endoscopy. This unit does over 300 capsule endoscopies per annum and was involved in writing international guidelines for its use. Owing to cost constraints, we sadly do not get training in our GI teaching institutions in the use of this modality. In addition, I assisted David Sanders, a leader in the field of Double Balloon Endoscopies (DBE). I acquired many useful, practical tips in the use of DBE, and have implemented these into my practise.

The YCP was an intense two-day course immediately prior to the Gastro 2009 meeting. Ninety young clinicians from almost 50 different countries were given the opportunity to be exposed to important GI topics and issues relevant to their current training and future academic work. The faculty consisted of international leaders in their respective fields. Simon Travis and Joseph Sung, amongst others, are well known to our shores. Core themes included dyspepsia/Barrett's, liver, IBD and colorectal cancer. Furthermore I attended practical skills sessions in advanced endoscopy, motility testing, capsule endoscopy and LFT interpretation. The YCP provided me not only with an invaluable chance to further my knowledge and skills, but enabled me to

meet new colleagues and to forge new friendships.

Gastro 2009 was held in the London Docklands. Not having attended an international congress before, the scale of Gastro 2009 blew my mind. There were 11 lecture halls, some of astronomical size, with continuous presentations throughout the day. In total 2664 abstracts were accepted with 474 being delivered as oral presentations and 2190 as posters. There was a record number of almost 14 600 participants. The first two days consisted of a postgraduate teaching program. With some plenary, but mostly parallel sessions, it was extremely difficult to decide which of the many superb lectures to attend. It always felt like I was missing out on something important. Highlights for me were the plenary sessions on management of IBD and new advances in the management of upper GI bleeding.

The next 3 days were spent running between oral presentations of ground breaking abstracts, state of the art lectures and satellite sessions. A highlight for me was an original paper session on stem cell and other new approaches in IBD. An industry sponsored satellite session was particularly memorable. It was an evening spent with Dutch colleagues on the top floor of the Tate Modern Museum, discussing new developments in the pathophysiology of IBD. The work presented was almost as stimulating as appreciating the evening London skyline while sipping a South African shiraz!

Presenting my abstract, even in poster form, amongst thousands of others was a wonderful, but tense experience. I was however made to feel at ease with many of my YCP friends and my co-authors Gill Watermeyer and Dave Epstein, providing moral support. The interaction with like-minded researchers was pleasant and it was enlightening to see how one's work can be improved and expanded upon, when viewed from a different perspective.

I returned home from London feeling exhausted but also exhilarated. I landed in Cape Town with the melody of "The lion sleeps tonight" still mauling around in my head. The biggest lesson I have learnt from this experience is that the lion should no longer be left to sleep as there is a whole jungle of new experiences and opportunities waiting to be explored.

I am extremely grateful for this opportunity. I would like to thank SAGES, Karin Fenton, Gill Watermeyer, Dave Epstein and the organisers of YCP. Without their support this wonderful opportunity would not have been possible.

Eduan Deetlefs