

8th Gastro Foundation Weekend for Fellows

The eighth annual Gastroenterology Foundation Fellows Weekend was held at the beautiful Spier Wine Farm during the weekend of 27th-29th January. The Fellows Weekend is a meeting dedicated to promoting the development of future specialists within gastroenterology. As a result of the formation of the Gastroenterology and Hepatology Association of sub-Saharan Africa (GHASSA), fellows from Ghana, Rwanda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Cameroon, Mozambique, Kenya and Nigeria joined their South African counterparts for the meeting.

As a first-time attendee, I was both excited and nervous for the unique experience to interact with senior faculty. An intense, tailored academic schedule lay ahead for both adult and paediatric medical gastroenterologists as well as future colorectal and hepatobiliary surgeons. Despite the academic nature of the proceedings, interactive discussions and enjoyment were stressed.

Friday morning began with early flights into Cape Town and a transfer to Spier Wine Farm. The first session was 'Top Tips' in various common gastroenterology topics presented by senior faculty and the international guest speaker, Prof Gerhard Rogler. Pearls of wisdom and experience were highlighted in these topics, clarifying many issues. The afternoon sessions were divided into specialist disciplines with faculty presenting short topics. The gastroenterology and colorectal fellows had an informative afternoon focusing on inflammatory bowel disease, whilst the hepatobiliary fellows were educated on common HPB topics. The legendary team quiz was led by Prof Krige and Prof Thompson, concluding formal proceeding on Friday with some rowdy fun.

Saturday morning began bright and early with a run/walk. The beautiful scenery of Stellenbosch was both refreshing and tranquil. The remainder of the day consisted of small group sessions with teaching on various topics. This was not only academically stimulating, but an opportunity for fellows and faculty alike to get to know one another personally. The relaxed nature of these sessions promoted interactive learning. The endoscopy quiz concluded academic formalities for Saturday. An amazing guest lecture by Dr Marina Elliott on "Homo Naledi" intrigued all that attended and stimulated numerous questions. A magnificent dinner concluded the evening at the distinguished Eight restaurant.

Sunday morning started with sessions on ultrasonography, fibroscan, colonoscopy techniques as well as capsule endoscopy. Dr Marina Elliott again inspired us with a discussion on mentorship prior to the feedback session. Lastly, the top performing team was rewarded at the prize giving along with some individuals for their entertaining comments made throughout the weekend.

We as future gastroenterology specialists in sub-Saharan Africa were privileged to have experienced the fellows weekend. It is an unique and rare opportunity to interact with colleges and faculty both academically and socially. Thank you to the Gastroenterology Foundation of South Africa for the continued support in facilitating the development of the next generation of specialists. A special thank you to the sponsors who made the weekend possible, namely Abbvie, Equity Pharmaceuticals, Janssen Pharmaceuticals, Medtronic, Olympus, Surgical Innovations and Takeda.

John Thomson

University of Witwatersrand