

Highlights of SASGO 2018

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The biannual Congress of the South African Society of Gynaecological Oncologists was recently held from 31 August to 2 September 2018 at the Spier Estate in Stellenbosch, Cape Town.

The Spier Estate proved to be an excellent venue, providing a relaxed scenic environment, enhanced by luxury accommodation, a variety of restaurants and award winning wine tasting.

The congress consisted of 2 full workshops on the Friday followed by the Congress itself on the Saturday and Sunday morning.

The Congress was attended by 207 delegates and had 60 different speakers. The delegates consisted of Gynaecological Oncologists, General Gynaecologists, Radiation and Medical Oncologists, General Practitioners, Registrars, Nurses and anyone with an interest in female malignancies.

We were privileged to have in attendance 2 international visiting speakers. Professor Allan Covens is the Chair of the division of Gynaecologic Oncology at the University of Toronto, widely published and a world renowned Gynaecological Oncologist. He gave 3 excellent presentations which stimulated a lot of thought and discussion. His first presentation highlighted the important topic of fertility sparing surgery in Cervical Cancer.

Professor Covens' next presentation was titled "Ovarian Cancer Management – Can we do better?" This opened up vigorous debate about the role of Primary Debulking Surgery versus Neo-Adjuvant Chemotherapy in advanced stage Ovarian Cancer. The benefit of surgery in Ovarian Cancer has been shown to be beneficial only if the cancer is debulked to zero macroscopic residual disease. The debate weighed up the morbidity, mortality and increased theatre time of Primary Surgery versus the potential decrease in disease free progression and overall survival with Neo-Adjuvant Chemotherapy and delayed primary surgery. Discussion highlighted the problems faced in resource constrained environments, such as the South African public sector, where decreased theatre time and huge patient numbers may lead to large numbers of patients receiving Neo-Adjuvant Chemotherapy.

Professor Covens' final lecture was on the role of Laparoscopy in Gynaecologic Cancer. Laparoscopy has become the standard of care in many countries worldwide for Endometrial and Cervical Cancer. Recent trials have, however, indicated that Laparoscopic Radical Hysterectomy for cervical cancer may have a worse disease free and overall survival when compared to Open Surgery. Professor Covens believes that we still, however, need more evidence and that we should not abandon Laparoscopic Radical Hysterectomies just yet.

The other member of our international faculty was Professor Michael Seckl from the Charing Cross Hospital in London, United Kingdom. He is a medical oncologist with a PhD in Biochemistry and is a world renowned expert in Gestational Trophoblastic Disease.

Professor Seckl's first presentation was on the management of Placental Site Trophoblastic Neoplasia. This excellent lecture highlighted the need for early diagnosis and intervention in this rare disease. Professor Seckl has also established an international data base to assist in providing data to enable research to enhance management of this condition. He requested that units in South Africa and Africa provide patient data to increase the data base, ultimately to improve the management of this rare disease.

His second presentation in the plenary session gave valuable new insights into the genetics and pathology of GTD. It was a real privilege to have such a knowledgeable lecturer providing this information and participating in many of our vigorous discussions on GTD and other topics.

Highlights of the Friday workshops were excellent sessions on Surgical Skills, HIV and Cancer, Screening for Gynaecological Cancers, Quality of Life after Cancer Treatment, Palliative Care and Fertility and Cancer.

The main Congress had many excellent sessions, but the session which generated the most discussion and debate was that titled "HPV Vaccination - How well are we doing?" The session had two excellent speakers in Professor Lyn Denny from the University of Cape Town and Professor Hennie Botha from Stellenbosch

University. The discussion centred on vaccination efficacy and safety and the role of the Health Care Professional in educating the public in order to provide wider coverage of vaccination throughout the population.

The last session of the congress was a Tumour Board which provided excellent case presentations of GTD, Ovarian, Cervical and Endometrial Cancers. These cases all generated robust discussion revolving around management of these difficult clinical scenarios.

The Congress was finally closed by the President of SASGO, Professor Greta Dreyer.

I would like to thank all the delegates who attended the congress and all the excellent local and international speakers. I would also like to thank the organising committee and events company for all the extremely hard work required to host such a successful congress.

Lastly, on behalf of the South African Society of Gynaecological Oncology, I would invite you to join us for the next SASGO Congress to be hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand in 2020.

Regards

Dr Bruce Howard