

Dear members of the British Division of the International Academy of Pathology,

I am Hiroshi Silva, from Sri Lanka; a post graduate trainee in histopathology attached to the department of pathology, University of Kelaniya. With great pleasure I would like to thank the BDIAP, for providing me the opportunity to attend the eleventh Joint BDIAP meeting held at the beautiful city of Maastricht, Netherlands, from 19th to 22nd of July in 2018. The four days I spent among the heroes of my time, whom I have known just by their words in book chapters and journal articles, was a turning point in my own life and definitely was an invaluable chance to be exposed to the international arena of pathology. I was able to gather knowledge, get updated on latest research findings and realize many potential research areas as well. More than anything I value the opportunity to experience many fascinating discussions between experts, deepening my understanding on the dynamic career, the realization I obtained on the utmost importance of networking and collaboration in the world of academia and the chance to foresee the opportunities the world has to offer young medics striving for excellence.

All sessions of the conference, were very well organized incorporating several challenging subject areas. The invited speakers, the ultimate experts in the relevant fields were very well versed and delivered pearls on the subject matter tactfully within the allocated 20 minute short sessions. They were much patient to answer the questions after the lectures and were kind enough to clarify some doubts, even when I interrupted them during short lunch breaks, along the corridors and stairs at times.

The trainee sessions were another extremely useful component of the program. The symposia on cytology and uterine pathology were designed to cater the requirements of trainees at various levels of the training in a seamless flow. The case competition gave me an opportunity to brainstorm in between the lectures, trying to workout the provided slides. The slide seminar held by the trainees met professional standards and all presenters were confident with their cases and were well prepared. The panel discussion the trainees had with a team of experienced examiners provided us a glimpse on the past, present and future of FRCpath examination and postgraduate training. This was an excellent platform to discuss the challenges faced by the trainees and to understand the weaknesses pointed out by the examiners. However the active involvement of

the UK and Netherland trainees in many components of the program, as well as in research presentations was inspiring and motivating, to build up a similar environment back at the homeland.

The TEFAF oncology summit addressing the future of cancer management, to which I participated with mixed feelings, turned out to be a surprise as I was able to gather a wealth of knowledge from the eminent speakers. I was able to obtain an understanding on the global cancer burden, cancer biology and oncogenesis as well as emerging trends in diagnostics and management of cancer.



A) A glimpse from the city center of Maastricht B) The MECC (Maastricht exhibition and conference center)—where the conference was held.

The organizers have paid a detailed attention for social activities aiming at networking the armatures and the experts. The reception held at the Bonnenfanten museum which holds an amazing collection of modern art, ranging from medieval sculpture to mind blowing Sol Lewitt installations was a great experience. The helpful curators described the pieces of art so vividly implanting an interest on the subject, in many of us. Though there were buses waiting to pick up the participants to and from the museum, many of us preferred taking a refreshing walk in small groups, gasping the natural beauty of the area and enjoying the cool evening breeze. The trainees boat trip was another memorable experience. The cruise went down the river Meuse passing many monuments and slowly under beautiful stone bridges. The running commentary

clearly explained the medieval buildings, castles and battlements, remnants from the past, which were carefully restored and maintained attracting many thousands of tourists to the city. This was an opportunity for the participants to discover the beauty and culture of this southern Holland city from the water.

The conference dinner held at the underground caves of Grotten Van Kanne, Reimst, Belgium was an extraordinary life time experience. It took us a few hundred years back into the history. An age old carriage driven by a gentleman who reminded us a chauffeur from 18th century, took us between the huge stone walls, paving the winding paths, in the ice cold will never be forgotten. Leaving aside the gloominess of the caves the reception was well set to raise the spirit of all. This was a perfect opportunity to get to know our fellow participants, and learn about how histopathology training differs around the rest of the world. I was able to make many productive contacts during these few hours including an initiation for a collaboration with a referral center from Amsterdam which I expect would be very beneficial for my own center in university of Kelaniya, which is the prime hepatobiliary and gastrointestinal center in our small island.



A) On our way to Bonnenfanten museum. B) At the conference reception held at underground caves of Grotten Van Kanne.

The conference not just improved my knowledge, but taught many lessons for life. One such simple experience was seeing Prof Phil Quirke a giant figure of our time, jotting down notes carefully onto a notebook while listening attentively to the speakers, proving the importance

of CPD and lifelong learning. Dr N Wilkinson to whom I am thankful for considering my request for a BDIAP bursary was very caring and concerned, making me feel familiar among this unknown gathering with a sense of acceptance and belonging. This brief encounter taught me, how much of a difference a small act of kindness towards a stranger could make. Dr J Verheij, who was sitting next to me at the conference dinner, a down to earth, friendly liver and hepatobiliary specialist from Amsterdam, shared some of her experiences and delivered some precious advices which I took home with me very safely.

The most sensitive experience I had during this journey was with a very cheerful and friendly young Phd student, engaged in colorectal malignancy related research, with lot of enthusiasm and hope. She shared her experience as a stage 3 colorectal cancer patient; which left me in disbelief. She who was brave to challenge a cancer was smart and dedicated enough to win a prize for one of the best research papers at the conference dinner. Isn't she a role model for many who grumble and make excuses for no valid reasons in day to life?

I feel that I have come back not only with new knowledge but with much inspiration for my future career and life. I was fortunate enough to distribute at least a part of the retained knowledge from the conference at motherland, by sharing the lecture notes published in the conference site and by discussing some of the topics presented at the conference, at our monthly journal club as per the request of my enthusiastic colleagues as well as the supportive supervisors. I recommended my colleagues who wish to expand their training and receive excellent teaching from experts in the field to take an attempt to join the future meetings, while myself nurturing the same hope for the future. These opportunities provided to trainees, through the generosity of BDIAP, would assist in equal distribution of benefits of the advancements in the field, to the less privileged communities as ours as well. I would wind up thanking BDIAP borrowing lord Buddha's words, 'the greatest gift is to give people your enlightenment, to share it. It has to be the greatest.'

