

BDIAP Bursary Award Report 2021
Rosalin Cooper, Wycombe Hospital, ST3
13th Joint meeting of the BDIAP and The Pathological Society

I was fortunate to be awarded a BDIAP bursary to attend Manchester Pathology 2021, the 13th Joint meeting of the BDIAP and The Pathological Society, between the 6th and 8th July. I had successfully submitted an abstract, and was due to present my research, which explores cell-free DNA (cfDNA) methylomes in patients with metastatic melanoma treated with immune checkpoint inhibitor therapy. The meeting comprised a variety of sessions exploring key aspects of both pathological research and clinical practice. This involved poster presentation sessions, clinical symposia, oral free paper sessions and a variety of keynote lectures. A great strength of the Manchester Pathology meeting was the diversity of the programme, spanning both clinical practice updates and cutting-edge research.

In view of my research exploring cfDNA methylomes in patients with melanoma, the sessions exploring 'liquid biopsy' approaches for diagnosis, prognostication and prediction were of particular interest. A variety of talks explored the clinical utility of circulating tumour cells and circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA) profiles. In addition, a particular highlight of Manchester Pathology 2021 for me was the Sir Nicholas Wright lecture, which was this year given by Dr Sarah Aitken who presented her work exploring cancer genome evolution in the context of hepatocellular carcinoma. It was fascinating to hear how somatic mutational profiles characterised with whole genome sequencing can be explored to describe the tumourigenic mechanisms.

Notably, recognising the rapid development of digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and increasing utilisation of digital pathology in both research and routine clinical practice, there were many presentations exploring the application of digital platforms in a variety of settings. These presentations discussed the use of digital pathology for routine reporting, for assessment of immunohistochemistry, as well as ethical and legal aspects of these emerging technologies. In addition, there were several sessions which explored the effect of the COVID-19 response on pathology reporting and post-mortem workload and practice.

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic the meeting was held virtually, with both poster and oral presentations pre-recorded and then live virtual Q&A sessions during the meeting. There were many advantages to this – chiefly amongst these the opportunity to review presentations and abstracts virtually and thus more flexibly. It might be hypothesised that remote attendance may also provide greater flexibility and allows for balancing of clinical and academic commitments, and thus may facilitate attendance across broader community of delegates. However, despite the benefits afforded by a virtual meeting, the limited opportunity to meet colleagues via the virtual platform means that I very much look forward to the return of in-person meetings.

My presentation and poster were well-received, and I was honoured to be awarded the Sir Alastair Currie Poster Prize and the BDIAP Bursary Abstract Prize. I am grateful to the BDIAP for their support of my attendance Manchester Pathology 2021. The skills and knowledge I have gained both through attendance at this meeting, and by presenting my research, will be valuable in both my future academic and clinical work.