BDIAP Report

The Manchester Pathology 2021 Conference boasted an impressive line-up of symposia, keynote lectures and poster presentations which drew in hundreds of delegates from across the world. Nestled within that virtual crowd – by which I mean, nestled on a sofa with my laptop and a cappuccino – I found that the virtual nature of it did little to diminish the experience. In fact, I found the conference far and away exceeded my already-high expectations.

I owe my gratitude to the BDIAP for their generosity in supporting my participation in this conference, which proved a terrific exchange of knowledge and ideas with very high-quality lectures and a host of excellent speakers. The event benefited from a format of parallel streaming of lectures geared towards different audiences with varying levels of understanding and disparate areas of interest. There was always a fascinating talk taking place and sometimes more than one, putting me in an enviable position of choosing between several excellent options.

The lectures that I found most enlightening were the trainee workshops covering weird and wonderful lymphomas and hepatopancreaticobiliary entities. These sessions highlighted to me the importance of reading widely; to diagnose an entity, it generally helps to be aware of its existence. Through other lectures, I gained new insights into endometrial cancer genetics, picked up a few tips about inflammatory bowel disease mimics and learned how to orientate my way around a Whipple specimen. The poster sessions were also very enjoyable, and it was impressive how much information it was possible to condense into a single page and two minutes of speech. The speakers' enthusiasm for their topics really shone in the question-and-answer sessions.

During this conference, I had the opportunity to present a poster on the development of vascular invasion by clear cell renal cell carcinoma. My poster highlighted the stages by which this process takes place and raised key questions: at which point should we consider it invasion? Is there a point at which metastatic potential significantly increases? Should the automatic staging of all these tumours as pT3a be reconsidered with this in mind? It seemed I had more questions than answers, but I am pleased that the poster generated an interesting discussion.

Virtual meetings have rapidly become a familiar and powerful tool during the course of the pandemic, bringing with them numerous benefits. They remove the need for distant travel and thereby save costs, time, and help to protect the environment. Virtual meetings also allow for larger audiences and help connect people from anywhere in the world. Renowned experts can impart their pearls of wisdom to thousands across the globe, reaching people who may never have otherwise benefitted from the opportunity to hear them speak live and answer their questions in real time, and from the comfort of their own home, no less. When the lectures are recorded, they enable delegates to revisit the material to reinforce their learning, and to catch any lectures they missed.

All the many benefits aside, there are things I miss about attending conferences in person. They were wonderful opportunities for networking and talking to individuals without an audience of hundreds listening in on your questions. Other things I miss enjoying a hearty dose of tea, sandwiches and gossip sandwiched between excellent lectures, snacks and sparkling wine over sparking conversation, and making interpersonal connections instead of struggling with internet connections.

Despite these minor tribulations, such conferences, even virtual, are invariably an invaluable asset, particularly to a budding pathologist. When facing a shifting landscape of redefined entities, ever-growing immunopanels, and the burgeoning field of genetics, pathology can seem like a daunting specialty. However, it is doubtlessly exciting. Having a line-up of world-class speakers lay the groundwork, smooth out areas of complexity and do so with vim is precisely what I hoped for when I joined this conference, and it is precisely what was delivered.

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