EDITOR's MESSAGE

IT has been a great pleasure for me and my editorial board to say hello to you at the first issue of our APLAR newsletter since the commencement of our term in January 2019. We would have wanted to greet you earlier if it were not our obligations to do better preparatory work so as to give you a surprise on the newsletter, having to work extra hard amidst our busy schedule at work. We are proud to present to you a new face of the newsletter tracking new features in a refreshed format.

It comes with mixed feeling despite my excitement to share with you these features. We feel a sense of loss including that Dr Prakash Pispati, founder of our newsletter, passed away last year. Dr Pispati founded the APLAR newsletter in 2016 which was named the Voice of APLAR (VOA). He had strong passion for education and was excellent in turning heavy history and clinical facts amusing. It is my privilege to have this respectable predecessor as pioneer who started a newsletter for the APLAR region.

As an academic in rheumatology and clinical immunology in Hong Kong, I need to move heavy demand on clinical service, education and research. I am honored to be appointed by the APLAR committee as chief editor for the APLAR newsletter. I have co-edited the column on News & Views from APLAR countries in earlier issues of the International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases. I am looking forward to this new challenge and to bringing in broader scope of features in the newsletter.

In our new format, we aim to bring our readers closer to what is happening at the levels of APLAR committees and various APLAR countries, not to mention elements of education and entertainment. To meet such goals, the editorial board has expanded from one-man band to a team of members from different APLAR countries. Members include clinical and academic rheumatologists, working extra hard but sharing the same vision to producing a newsletter that is enjoyable to read. We have often to meet on Skype to discuss our plans across time zones that span a difference of five hours. Despite this restraint, we have been planning brainstorming and working closely together. It is my gift to have their contribution in the team.

As a first step to the new face of the newsletter, we changed the name to "APLAR Pulse", a pulse that beats with the circulation generated from the heart of APLAR countries that links readers closely to APLAR. We are targeting circulation three times in a year. In addition to News & Views from various APLAR countries, we are tracking on a highlight topic in each issue, events of various APLAR committees, reports from APLAR-supported fellowships, special interest groups and various research grants. To keep in pace with the development of APLAR Young Rheumatologists (AYR), we have designated features for young rheumatologists. We are striving to improve and cherish your feedback.

Here is the fruit of our first issue. Happy reading! The writer is Dr Temy My Mok, Associate Professor, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

HIGHLIGHTS — The 21st APLAR Congress in Brisbane

The 21st Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR) congress was held in Brisbane during April 8-11 2019. This time, the annual APLAR congress was held in conjunction with the annual Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA) congress. The theme of the congress was reflected through its high-profile scientific program on the outstanding advances and achievements in the field of rheumatology and also discoveries of new therapies that help alleviate disease burden of patients with rheumatic and autoimmune diseases. There were pre-congress workshops, plenary presentations, concurrent sessions and poster presentations.
EXPERTS in the field of rheumatology from all over the world exchanged the best of their knowledge. There were over 1,800 delegates who came from various parts of the world participating at the congress and among presenters at poster or oral presentation sessions.

The congress began with an entertaining opening ceremony, with traditional Aboriginal dance. Awards were presented to APLAR Master awardees and APLAR centers of Excellence.

**New faces of delegates and presenters at the poster presentation sessions**

- Personalised Medicine was a key message including a patient’s phenotype, genetics, biomarkers, environmental factors, and lifestyle.
- Benefits of precision medicine include earlier diagnosis of rheumatic conditions and the ability to design customized treatment plans. The goal of future treatment of rheumatic diseases will take on personalized approach to individual patient as early as possible so as to reduce disability secondary to the rheumatic condition.

Other talks at the congress covered updates in various rheumatic diseases such as systemic vasculitis, lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, spondyloarthritis, gout and many others.

The congress ended with a very well organized grand round session, with very interesting cases presented and involved the participants to think and discuss those cases.

The writer is Dr Laniyati Hamijoyo, consultant, University of Padjadjaran Bandung, Indonesia

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**Conference president’s view on the APLAR Congress**

NEARLY 1900 delegates attended this year’s APLAR Congress, which was a joint meeting with the Australian Rheumatology Association (ARA), held in Brisbane from April 8-11, with two days of pre-congress meetings beforehand. With the engagement of organizational committees including from the ARA, APLAR’s own scientific committee and special interest groups, and a local scientific committee, the speaker faculty was very strong. 97 invited speakers presented, coming from a wide range of APLAR member countries, Australia and New Zealand, as well as from Europe and North America. Both EULAR and the ACR supported speakers to attend for special joint sessions with APLAR. This enabled four concurrent sessions to be run at any time, ensuring that there was wide coverage of clinical and translational science across paediatric and adult rheumatology, as well as allied health areas. Sessions were deliberately designed with a mixture of clinical and research/science content, bringing together the overlapping but different communities involved.

As befitting profession where a high proportion of professionals are women, APLAR-ARA 2019 was proud to be the first major international rheumatology congress where more than half of the invited speakers, and of the session chairs, were women. This contributed to the strength of the presentations, as the congress made full use of the amazing scientific and clinical experts in our profession. We hope that this sets a mark for future congresses, and promotes gender equality at all levels in our profession.

Held at the Brisbane Exhibition and Convention Centre in the picturesque Southbank precinct of the city, next to the river, the convention was only a short walk from all the hotels accommodating delegates. Southbank’s nearby restaurants and bars made for vibrant evenings for all. Attendance at the trade display was excellent, at least partly because of the excellent food, and the Australian native wildlife handling display, where delegates were able to touch and even hold giant snakes, cute little sugar gliders, and other animals. Oh, and also because of the great trade exhibits!

Novel program features included both Year in Review and Year in Preview sessions, where the dynamic Asian rheumatology clinical and research fields were highlighted, and we were given an exciting almost science fiction like vision of what’s to come. The final session of the conference was the Grand Rounds, where some really challenging cases were presented and the audience engaged in working it all out, with a moderate level of success. APLAR-ARA closed off with a performance of indigenous Australian dancing and didgeridoo playing, leaving delegates with a sense of the great cultural depth and diversity that Australia is home to.

As the local organiser of the conference, I would like to thank again the speakers, session chairs and everyone who assisted in putting together this great event, and to wish the organisers of APLAR 2020 in Kyoto the best of fortune with their meeting. [https://aplar2020.com](https://aplar2020.com), put it in your diary now!

The writer is Professor Matt Brown, Queensland University of Technology.
Obituary to Prakash Pispati, founding editor of Voice of APLAR

THE voice of APLAR is no more. Prakash Pispati, the founding editor of "Voice of APLAR" passed away into eternity on 15th October 2018.

Friend to countless rheumatologists across the globe, doctor to innumerable patients, mentor to dozens of youngsters, this passionate advocate of rheumatology led a full life.

Dr. Prakash Pispati was born in Baroda (now Vadodara), India on 12 August 1938. His father was a doctor. He completed his schooling in a Marathi medium vernacular school in Mumbai and subsequently graduated in chemistry and microbiology from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. He went on to study medicine at the renowned Grant Medical College and Sir JF Group of Hospitals where he obtained his MSc in Medicine and MD. He was a Gold Medalist in Pharmacology. Dr Pispati was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, London in 1990.

In his early career he worked as the Medical Director of Boots and was actively engaged as a directorial team member in antirheumatic research culminating in the introduction of ibuprofen. He went on to attend multiple courses and rotary sabbaticals at several centres in UK and USA including the Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, Bath and the Albert Einstein Medical Center, Philadelphia. In his words "am gratefully impacted by so many outstanding Rheumatology teachers and inspiring personalities in the UK, USA, Asia Pacific, and indeed India." He started consultative practice at Mumbai in 1979-1980. He was Director of Rheumatology at Jaslok Hospital Mumbai and Senior Consultant Rheumatologist at the Saifee Hospital, Mumbai. He was instrumental in organising free arthritis camps every month for nearly 5 years treating over 6400 needy patients and taking Rheumatology to the door steps of the community. His talks were full of humour and he revelled in getting the attention, involvement and active participation of the audience. As he would often say “there are two types of speakers in the world-those who make simple things complex and those who make complex things simple”. He characterised the latter. He was a regular at the APLAR, EULAR, ACR, ILAR meetings and the IRACONs (annual meetings of the Indian Rheumatology Association). His child like curiosity was evident at all these conferences where one would find him in animated conversation with the speakers and attendees, be it the nuances of molecular biology or history of medicine or advances in clinical rheumatology. Not for Prakash the passive participation as a back bencher. Rather it was active engagement that left an indelible mark on all those who came in contact with him. After the hectic academic deliberations, he would be game to party, sight see and explore the city. His indefatigable spirit and infectious enthusiasm epitomised joie de vivre.

Apart from communication, he had the distinction of lecturing in all the continents. His talks were full of humour and he revelled in getting the attention, involvement and active participation of the audience. As he would often say “there are two types of speakers in the world-those who make simple things complex and those who make complex things simple”. He characterised the latter. He was a regular at the APLAR, EULAR, ACR, ILAR meetings and the IRACONs (annual meetings of the Indian Rheumatology Association). His child like curiosity was evident at all these conferences where one would find him in animated conversation with the speakers and attendees, be it the nuances of molecular biology or history of medicine or advances in clinical rheumatology. Not for Prakash the passive participation as a back bencher. Rather it was active engagement that left an indelible mark on all those who came in contact with him. After the hectic academic deliberations, he would be game to party, sight see and explore the city. His indefatigable spirit and infectious enthusiasm epitomised joie de vivre.

From his early career he was a doctor. He nurtured his first love and he nourished the fledging organisation over several decades when it was headquartered at Mumbai. He served IRA as its Secretary and then President. He was a stickler for protocol. Not the one to brook tardiness, he had his share of detractors. However, he had the resilience to appreciate another person’s viewpoint and concede ground if convinced by logical reasoning. Prakash Pispati was also the President of APLAR where he initiated the formation of Rheumatology societies in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. To commemorate APLAR’s 50th anniversary in 2013, he put together a volume "APLAR at 50: Celebration & Inspiration" that chronicled Rheumatology endeavours in 29 member nations and was released at the APLAR Congress in Bali.

Prakash was the founding Editor of Manual of Rheumatology, India’s first multi-author textbook of Rheumatology, now in its 5th edition. He was Editor in Chief of the first two editions. He went on to moot and execute the idea of a quarterly news bulletin - The Voice of APLAR. VOA was launched at a glittering ceremony at APLAR Congress Shanghai on September 26, 2016. The idea was to entertain, inform and involve rheumatology diaspora across the Asia Pacific and other parts of the world with news, essays, commentaries and snippets. He successfully edited it for 2 years.

During a long and illustrious career, Dr Pispati received several awards and accolades notably MN Passey Award by the IRA for his distinguished contribution to Indian Rheumatology, APLAR Honorary Member, Master of APLAR and Master of ACR. Apart from Rheumatology, Prakash Pispati was a sportsman with a tremendous spirit for adventure. He was a regular tennis player and keenly interested in sailing. He did parasailing, paragliding, helicopter and floatplane trips in Alaska, landing in remote lakes and areas and exploring them. He would always say “tennis teaches me to applaud better players” and on sailing “am humbled by the ocean - so vast and deep. Is Medicine any different?”

His wife, Dr Hemalata Pispati was Professor of Physiology at TN Medical College and Nair Hospital, Mumbai and predeceased him. They are survived by two accomplished children, a son, an orthopaedic surgeon at Mumbai and a daughter, a dentist at Toronto. In his later years, he would say “I don’t lecture anymore … am a story teller. If creative researchers are the DNA of Rheumatology, then may I be its modest messenger RNA.” His swan song at the last APLAR conference he attended at Kaoshiung, Taiwan in September 2018 was titled “Expression and Impressions - How to, rather NOT to Stage Scientific Presentation: Interactive, participative Golden Hour”. He was lecturing till two days before his sudden death (his last talk at Saifee Hospital a couple of days before his sudden death).

"Rest in Peace my friend.

The fraternity of Rheumatology salutes you.

The writer is Dr Rohini Handa, Dean of Indian College of Rheumatology and a former President of APLAR and the Indian Rheumatology Association.
The Asia Pacific League of Association for Rheumatology

THE Asia Pacific League of Association for Rheumatology initially began its journey in Sydney, Australia in 1963 as SEAPAL (South East Asia and Pacific Area League Against Rheumatism). The Asia-Pacific region, Japan and India were the founding members. Over the course of 55 years, 29 countries joined this esteemed league. APLAR is carrying out its role in patient care, education and research in rheumatology in Asia-Pacific through its manifold activities:

**International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases (IJRD):** Keeping with its mission of promoting awareness and knowledge on the means of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of rheumatic diseases, APLAR publishes its official journal “International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases”. The journal has progressed quite fast during the last decade and its current impact factor is 2.423.

**Annual Congress:** Annual congress is the core and the most vibrant APLAR event. APLAR holds its congress every year. The congress brings together rheumatologists from all over Asia-Pacific and also from outside this region. The congress serves educational purposes and as a hotspot for exchange of views and experience among its participants. The congress also brings opportunity of interacting and developing collaborations with the sister organizations including EULAR, ACR, PANLAR and APLAR.

**APLAR-COPCORD:** APLAR patronizes the Community-Oriented Program for Control of Rheumatic Disorders (COPCORD) for data collection on prevalence and risk factors for common rheumatic disorders with an ultimate goal of reduction of rheumatic and musculoskeletal morbidity in the community. 16 countries from the Asia-Pacific region have so far contributed data to the global literature.

**Special Interest Groups (SIGs):** APLAR has several special interest groups (SIGs) dedicated to 12 categories of rheumatic diseases, musculoskeletal ultrasonography and Pediatric Rheumatology. In these groups, representatives from different Member Nations Organisations (MNOs) collaborate for developing collaborative researches and treatment recommendations. The RA and SpA treatment guidelines have already been published. The IEULAR-APLAR collaboration: APLAR has undertaken two-fold cooperation with EULAR:

- **EULAR school of rheumatology (ESOR) program:** Esor is an integrated learning system with easy login, access to their profile and all educational offerings at a glance. APLAR will sponsor young rheumatologist (AYR members) to join ESOR as member.
- **EULAR-APLAR congress exchange program:** When launch, 5 AYR members and 5 Emeunet members will be supported to participate in the APLAR and EULAR congresses, a one and a half days workshop organized by the respective CoE, and a one week stay at a selected EULAR or APLAR CoE immediately before or after the congress. APLAR will fund the transport and accommodation of the Emeunet member and vice versa.

To conclude, as APLAR is one big family, the united strength in advancing rheumatology in a cohesive manner will be possible when there is an ease of communication among all the MNOs. The writer is Prof Syed Atiqul Haq, President of APLAR.
APLAR Master Awardees 2019

APLAR Master Award is an honorary award given to a member of an APLAR national organization in recognition of outstanding contributions to the field of rheumatology through teaching, research, or professional services which have had significant impact within the APLAR region. This year, the awardees include Prof Chung-Tei Chou from Taiwan, Prof Handono Kalim from Indonesia and Prof Vinay Ramchandra Joshi from India.

We shall feature Prof Handono Kalim in this issue and other awardees in the upcoming issues.

Prof Kalim obtained his internist certificate at the University of Indonesia, Jakarta. He developed the Department of Internal Medicine at the University of Brawijaya, Malang. He has also been active in developing rheumatology in Indonesia ever since. In 1994, he was appointed as professor at Brawijaya University. He served as president of the Indonesian rheumatology association (IRA) 2005-2014. His particular interest is in autoimmunity, especially rheumatic disease. He was involved in various professional organisations in Indonesia and was the founder of several community organisations related to rheumatic diseases. Even though he is now retired, he still actively teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students to assist community activities in the prevention of rheumatic disease. He has published research results in more than 125 journals and has published several books.

APLAR Center of Excellence

APLAR aims to improve standards across the three pillars of excellence, namely patient care, education & training and research in the Asia Pacific region. A certification is awarded to centers that demonstrate excellence in at least two among these 3 pillars and thus serve as reference centre for the APLAR region.

This year, 5 more rheumatology units or centers at University affiliated hospitals are given the award, including those from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, China and South Korea. There are now a total of 20 rheumatology centers which have been given the award at the APLAR region.

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<td>Catholic University of Korea, South Korea</td>
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<td>University of Occupational and Environmental Health, Japan</td>
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<td>Keio University School of Medicine, Japan</td>
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<td>Singapore General Hospital, Singapore</td>
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“What a Big Surprise” - Prof Handono Kalim

ATTENDING APLAR congress always gave me unforgettable memories, besides being able to meet a lot of rheumatologist colleagues from many countries; the congress improved my knowledge and competencies in rheumatology as well. Furthermore, it fulfills my hobby for travelling. I am in awe at their achievements which have driven me. From year to year, APLAR has made a lot of progress, in becoming a well-respected regional organization with high quality publication. The steadily increasing quality makes APLAR congress interesting to attend. APLAR also succeeded in regeneration, with more young rheumatologists playing important roles in various activities.

An extraordinary feeling followed my departure to the 2019 APLAR/ARA congress in Brisbane. Honored by the announcement that I was one of the winners for the Master Award, I was very surprised and almost did not believe it, frankly, I feel that there is not much that I did for APLAR. Maybe, I was chosen because I was one of the oldest APLAR members who attended almost all the congresses (albeit often only as a passive participant). On the other hand, perhaps APLAR gave me the award to stimulate and to remind Indonesian rheumatologists to be more active in the organization. Anyhow, I feel very regarded and appreciated by APLAR.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the APLAR committee that has chosen me for this award. I have received many well wishes, including from the current APLAR chairman Prof. Atiqul Haq who is one of my best friends in this organization. My visit to Bangladesh several years ago gave me a lot of good memories that I frequently convey to rheumatologists in Indonesia.

Indonesia is a huge country in terms of population, however in rheumatology; Indonesia is still a small country. There are relatively few high quality scientific rheumatology publications published by Indonesian rheumatologists. One of the main reasons is related to the unbalanced ratio between the numbers of rheumatologists, with less than 100 rheumatologists to a population of over 250 million. It causes a lot of setbacks in terms of time in serving and educating patients. Despite these obstacles, more publications have been published in recent years. Almost all Indonesian rheumatologists congratulated me on the award. They hope this can inspire them to achieve a more accomplished goal, which is also my genuine hope. In the future, I believe that Indonesian rheumatologists will be more involved in different APLAR activities, specifically for rheumatology advancement in general and I will continually encourage Indonesian rheumatologists to love their work.
Fun facts at APLAR congress in Brisbane

The APLAR/ARA Congress in Brisbane was a highly successful forum for the exchange of cutting-edge scientific research. The ARA extends special thanks to convenor Professor Matt Brown and the local organizing team who pulled together a great event.

**Some statistics:**
- Total industry sponsorship for the Congress topped over US$1.5 million
- Total registered delegates: **1,856** (includes sponsors and exhibitors)
  - Australian attendees: **877**
  - Invited speakers: **50**
  - International attendees: **979**
  - Invited speakers: **47**
  - Sponsor & exhibitor registrations: **142**
  - Industry partners (sponsors): **10**
  - Industry exhibition booths: **26**

The top 10 countries who attended were Australia, China, Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Taiwan, India, Hong Kong.

A highlight of the Congress was the Australian Animal Petting Zoo. A variety of Native Australian Animals were brought into the exhibition hall daily at lunch time and it was a real hit with all the delegates. Some of those on show were:

- Social media was a new feature of this event and the newly created ARA Early Career Group were very active throughout the Congress.
- To find out more information, please go to the APLAR 2019 website.
- The writer is Suzanne Marks, Executive Officer of the Australian Rheumatology Association.

Comments from APLAR attendees

**Aisha Lateef (Singapore):** This is my third time attending APLAR, this is one of the best, the speakers are good, organizing of the session was also very good.

**Sumartini Dewi (Indonesia):** This is very interesting meeting. This provided a lot of new information to rheumatologists, for example about the genomic in systemic sclerosis.

**Thilinie de Silva (Australia):** I am very impress of the meeting, I learnt a lot about rheumatology during this meeting, especially about targeted therapy. I have two posters presentation about myositis and osteoarthritis.

**Pannipa Bupparennoo (Thailand):** this is my first time attending APLAR, I think overall is OK, there is a lot of innovative in Rheumatology, some session is very advanced that I don’t understand. About the atmosphere here is very good. The location is very nice. The sightseeing places also very good. The staff served very well.

**Noreen Nasir (Pakistan):** I must say, I was overtaken by the wealth of knowledge and clinical experience that was shared at APLAR-ARA 2019. I eagerly look forward to participate next year in Kyoto.

The reporters are Dr Laniyati Hamijoyo, and Dr Tahira Parveen Umer.
World arthritis day in Kuwait

On the occasion of celebrating the World Arthritis Day on 12 October 2018, the Kuwait Association of Rheumatology celebrated the day with an open day for the public. The event included educational lectures with question and answer and interactive session between rheumatology consultants and the public, and giving away prizes for a contest between the patients based on answering educational quiz on rheumatology. There was also a separate hall to educate and entertain the adolescent and pediatric patients. The event was followed by 2 weeks of extensive media campaign.

International rheumatology conference in Pakistan

The 23rd International Conference of Pakistan Society for Rheumatology was held in Karachi from 14th till 17th March 2019. A number of renowned national as well as international speakers presented their topics. The international speakers were from all over the world i.e. USA, UK, Iraq, Singapore, Malaysia and the UAE. The inauguration of the conference was done by the president of Pakistan, Dr. Arif Alvi. There was a pre-conference session on “Humanizing health care” and a hands-on workshop on Musculoskeletal disorders and intra-articular injection techniques. This was followed by a public awareness program, which was attended by a vast number of patients. A review course was also conducted for the post-graduates and general practitioners. Then followed the main scientific sessions, which comprised of talks on almost all the aspects of Rheumatology. On the whole the conference was a great success. We are now looking forward to the next conference due in Spring 2020 in Rawalpindi Pakistan.

International rheumatology conference in Hong Kong

The International Conference of Chinese Rheumatologists (ICCR) organized by the Hong Kong Society of Rheumatology is one of the most important rheumatology meeting in Asia-Pacific region. In 2018, the conference was successfully held in Kowloon Shangri-La Hong Kong on 17-18 November 2018. It was a conjoint meeting with the 13th Guangdong-Hong Kong Rheumatology Seminar. The exciting two day’s programme consisted of plenary sessions and symposiums covering a wide range of rheumatic diseases. A total of 18 internationally renowned speakers were invited to deliver lectures in the meeting. Participants all over the Asia-Pacific area have been attracted to attend the conference. The conference was a great success with a new record of over 270 delegate’s registrations. During the conference, a total of 4 concurrent symposiums were organized (Symposium of the Greater Bay Area Rheumatologists, Rheumatology Ultrasound Workshop, ARISE with APLAR; Rheumatology Nursing Advancement and Directions and Meet the Expert session; Myositis). All these symposiums were well attended by the participants with overwhelming response. To continue on the success, the ICCR 2019 conference will be held at Sheraton Hong Kong Hotel & Tower on 30 November -1 December 2019. A pre-conference Musculoskeletal Ultrasound Course (pending EULAR endorsement) will also be organized on 27-29 November 2019. They are going to be highly educational and fruitful meetings one cannot afford to miss in 2019.

Keio University and Indonesian Rheumatology Association: Collaborative Course on Rheumatology

To celebrate 60 years in collaboration between Japan and Indonesia, Rheumatology division of Keio University and Indonesian Rheumatology Association (IRA) organised an educational course on Rheumatology in both countries which was a part of “Projects for global growth of medical technologies, systems, and services through human resource development in 2018” approved by Japan National Center for Global Health and Medicine. Keio University is one of APLAR certified centers of excellence.

Indonesia Round

The course for the Indonesia Round was held in Jakarta, Indonesia from September 21 to 23, 2018. Speakers from Japan and Indonesia including rheumatologists, registered nurse and pharmacist, shared their knowledge and experiences in the management of patients with rheumatic diseases. The Japanese delegates also visited several other universities in Indonesia, such as University of Indonesia Jakarta, University of Padjadjaran Bandung and University of Udayana Denpasar, Bali.
International rheumatology conference in Korea

THE 39th Korean College of Rheumatology Annual Scientific Meeting and the 13th International Symposium (KCR 2019) was held from May 16th to 18th, 2019 at Seoul Dragon City in Seoul, Korea.

More than 850 people pre-registered for the meeting, and more than 1,000 people attended the meeting. We invited 33 international faculty speakers from all over the world, and we received total 363 abstracts with 181 abstracts from 29 countries abroad. Based on the fact that a half of abstracts were submitted from abroad, KCR2019 was truly a successful international conference. As more countries participated in KCR2019 meeting, KCR is advancing to become a sophisticated society and will keep developing through academic exchange with more researchers and experts in the field.

Asia-Pacific Initiative for Rheumatology Nurse Education in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

THE Rheumatology department of Fauji Foundation Hospital, Rawalpindi, Pakistan was awarded a grant on ‘Asia-Pacific Initiative for Rheumatology Nurse Education’ from (APLAR-ASPIRE) with the aim to teach 50 nurses. The event was successfully held during 7th-9th Feb 2019.

Interactive Rheumatology workshop in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

FAUJI Foundation Hospital Rawalpindi Pakistan Conducted an “Interactive Rheumatology Workshop” for the medical students, physiotherapists, trainees and nurses on 14th December 2018 in collaboration with Shifa International Hospital Islamabad.

Congratulations to new Rheumatology Fellows!

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THE APLAR Young Rheumatologists (AYR) was first conceptualised in 2016. The purpose of AYR is to provide a conductive and nurturing environment within the APLAR for young rheumatologists to network and collaborate in education, research and social activities. AYR also aims to encourage young rheumatologists in the Asia Pacific region to participate in all activities of APLAR and to nurture future leaders of APLAR.

The AYR working group represented by 22 countries first met in October 2017, at the Dubai APLAR congress with seventeen young rheumatologists. The interim board of AYR consisting of nine members was appointed in June 2018 as follows:

Chairperson:
Dr Yew Kuang Cheng (Singapore)

Vice Chair:
Prof Yukinori Okada (Japan) & Dr Jiuliang Zhao (China)

Secretary:
Dr Babur Salim (Pakistan)

Treasurer:
Dr Geraldine Zamora Racaza (Philippines)

Educational Chairperson:
Dr Ghita Harifi (UAE) & Dr Priscila Wong (Hong Kong)

Webmaster:
Dr Himantha Atukorale (Sri Lanka) & Dr Padmanabha Shemoy (India)

The AYR Board oversee tasks such as international collaboration, social media, membership recruitment drive, AYR symposia. We gradually grew our network initiating our membership drive for the first time at the 2018 APLAR Congress in Taiwan.

Education, research, leadership development and social activities are the four pillars of AYR. Any trainee or consultant ≤40 years of age can join our team with the approval of their respective member national organisations. The young rheumatologists can apply to hold posts in the AYR board, make use of research/clinical fellowships/travel grants to attend APLAR and focused meetings. Additionally all young rheumatologists are offered free access to APLAR educational resources including the International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases. The annual APLAR congress offers a concessionary registration fee for all AYR members. The terms of reference will be made available on the APLAR website.

The AYR held its first ever symposium in collaboration with the Australian Rheumatology Association during the APLAR Congress Brisbane April 2019. The session covered various themes relevant to rheumatology, and was the first of its kind.

We also established contact with our EULAR counterpart (EMEUNET) in July 2018. The APLAR and EULAR collaborations that are in the pipeline include the APLAR - European School of Rheumatology programme (ESOR) which aim to provide AYR members an online course in rheumatology at a subsidized rate. ESOR will cover 50 illustrated topics and more than 300 hours of online learning. Another proposed educational activity is to provide opportunity and funding for AYR members to be attached to a EULAR Centre of Excellence; via the EULAR-APLAR exchange program.

We base our activities spanning a population of 2.7 billion people of all ages. Our young rheumatologists hail from communities which are culturally rich and diverse. Similarly the variety of rheumatological ailments seen in these patients are enormous which makes our task of treatment more challenging yet exciting.

There is a surge of interest in social networking media such as blogs, micro blogs (Twitter), social networking sites (Facebook) and content sharing sites like YouTube. We have identified the benefits of social media in bridging young rheumatologists spanning a 10 hour global time zone. The AYR is also aware of the value of e-professionalism and regulating media usage to safeguard ethics in rheumatology practices. The APLAR Facebook and Twitter platforms is a rich source of updates on the latest happenings within the league of associations. AYR derives its strength from the members. Your keenness in taking over lead roles in our group motivates us. Join us and expand your network of knowledge and research across continents. Take part in our social activities. Meet rheumatology colleagues and amplify your leadership capabilities.

As a concluding statement, we are the APLAR Young Rheumatologists. We speak rheumatology in more than one half of the world! And we are there to serve more than one half of the globe!

The writers are
Dr Himantha Atukorale (webmaster, AYR) and
Dr Yew Kuang Cheng (chairman, AYR)
Dr Sonia Nasreen Ahmad was awarded the APLAR Fellowship grant in 2016. It all started with the love of medicine. While pursuing my post-graduate fellowship in internal medicine I had the privilege of working with some of the best rheumatologists in Bangladesh; Professors Syed Atiqul Haq, Nazrul Islam and Minhaz Rahim Choudhury. It was there I realized that a lot of connective tissue and joint diseases remain undiagnosed in our country; partly because of the lack of experience in dealing with these conditions.

I was on a family holiday when I got the grant email. Needless to say I was ecstatic. I started sorting all the required documents for my departure to Australia (my mentor was Professor Kevin Pile). However, at the last minute, changes to the Australian visa system made traveling there next to impossible. Luckily I was able to avail a hands on training at the Royal Free Hospital in London, United Kingdom under the supervision of Dr Richard Stratton.

The Royal Free Hospital is a Center of Excellence for Connective Tissue Diseases, especially scleroderma. Being an uncommon disease in Bangladesh, I got to attend various clinics, not just rheumatology clinics but dedicated clinics on dermatology and pulmonary hypertension. While it was rewarding to see patients with Raynaud’s, digital ulceration and calcinosis coming in for treatment with Iloprost, and patients with various inflammatory arthritis receive biologic treatment free of cost from the National health services; I was mindful of the fact that the scenario would be quite different back home in Bangladesh. Despite that, it was good to experience the wide spectrum of these diseases. Dr Stratton, has a huge interest in the pathology of scleroderma. I was asked to take part in a project to investigate whether interleukin 31 had any role in the pathogenesis of scleroderma calcinosis. The project included taking blister fluids and blood samples in scleroderma patients and controls and analyzing the interleukin levels. Unfortunately, as the samples did not give us the anticipated result, the project did not materialize into a publication. (continued on page 11…)

A 70-years old male with long standing history of sero positive RA and poor compliance to treatment, presented with gritty sensation in eyes and dimness of vision. Blue choroid coming through thin sclera can be seen.

What is the diagnosis? (Answer on page 12)

The writer of this case is Dr Tahira Parveen Umer, Assistant Prof, Liaquat Medical University, Karachi, Pakistan

"To me, the future does indeed seem bright. With more public awareness, I expect we can tackle these diseases earlier and faster.”

SAVE THE DATE

22nd Asia-Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology Congress
31 August – 3 September 2020
Kyoto, Japan

APLAR PULSE 2019 June
APLAR Young Rheumatologists
2019 update of the APLAR recommendations for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis

APLAR has published an update to a set of recommendations for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in 2018. The recommendations report on emerging new evidence and expert opinion made since the APLAR Recommendations on RA were published in 2015.

TREATMENT in RA aims at remission or low disease activity. The updated recommendations provide physicians and patients with updated consensus guidance on the management of RA. A systematic literature review was performed, followed by the modified Delphi method, which was used to form questions, elicit expert opinions and reach consensus. The guideline was developed using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) method, which provides rigorous standards for judging the quality of the literature available and assigns strengths to the recommendations that are largely based on the quality of the available evidence.

This update on RA provides 16 treatment recommendations based on current best evidence and expert clinical opinion.

Recommendations 1-3 deal with the use of conventional synthetic disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (csDMARDs). This recommendation emphasized starting treatment with csDMARD mono-therapy, preferably methotrexate (MTX), as soon as the diagnosis of RA is made. The next three recommendations (4-6) cover the need for screening and management of infections and co-morbid conditions prior to starting targeted therapy, while the following seven recommendations focus on the use of these agents. This recommendation addresses choice of targeted therapy, switch, tapering and discontinuation. The last three recommendations elaborate on targeted therapy for RA in special situations such as pregnancy, cancer, and major surgery.

The writer is Dr Shamim Ahmed, Associate Prof, BSM Medical University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

(continued from page 11)

DESPITE this drawback, the whole process brought me into contact with molecular medicine, a field not that florid yet in Bangladesh. My fellow colleagues at the Royal Free were a mixed group from Spain, Turkey, Greece and Australia; some have and some have not had previous rheumatology postgraduate training. Despite these differences, the whole environment was a very constructive one where there was a lot of exchange of knowledge and experiences. Armed with a wider perspective on rheumatology, I have started a dedicated rheumatology outdoor clinic at the institute where I work, Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Previously we did not have a separate clinic and most joint cases were often referred to the orthopaedic department. It has been over a year now since I have come back to Bangladesh. With more focused teaching and clinics, there has been growing interest in the rheumatology specialty among the newly graduated doctors as well as medical students.

The writer is Dr Sonia Nasreen Ahmad, Holy Family Red Crescent Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh

Summary of the recommendations for RA: focus on targeted therapy

1. Starting treatment with csDMARD monotherapy, preferably methotrexate (MTX), is recommended as soon as the diagnosis of RA is made

2. Patients who cannot tolerate MTX may receive other csDMARDs such as leflunomide (LEF) and sulfasalazine (SSZ) as 1st-line treatment. Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), iguratimod, bucillamine, cyclosporine, intramuscular gold or tocrolimus may also be considered depending on availability

3. In patients with high disease activity, combination csDMARD therapy should be considered, with close monitoring of therapy-related toxicities

4. Prior to starting targeted therapy, all patients should be evaluated for the presence of active or inter-current infections, co-morbidities including lymphoproliferative disorders and skin cancers, vaccinations, pregnancy, and possible contraindications

5. (a) All patients should be screened for infections including tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis B virus (HBV), hepatitis C virus (HCV) and human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV) for high-risk population before initiating targeted therapy. Patients with active or latent infections should receive adequate therapy

(b) For RA patients with latent TB, prophylactic treatment according to country-specific guidelines is recommended to prevent TB reactivation

(c) For RA patients with HBV infection (active or occult), antiviral therapy should be prescribed to prevent HBV reactivation

6. (a) Vaccination should be undertaken prior to initiating targeted therapy

(b) During targeted therapy, live attenuated virus vaccines are contraindicated. Pneumococcal and influenza vaccines are recommended. Vaccines for HBV, human papilloma virus (HPV) and meningococcal infections are conditionally recommended

7. Targeted therapies, including tumour necrosis factor inhibitors (TNFi), non-TNFi and JAK inhibitors, can be prescribed to patients who have moderate or high disease activity despite adequate treatment with csDMARD, or in patients with intolerance to csDMARD

8. Based on currently available evidence, all targeted therapies are equally effective in the treatment of RA when combined with MTX or csDMARDs

9. All patients receiving targeted therapy should be closely monitored for therapy-related toxicities

10. For RA patients with a history of TB or latent TB (or in whom the risk remains high despite negative screening), targeted therapies other than monoclonal antibody TNFi are preferred

11. In RA patients at increased risk of HBV reactivation, targeted therapies other than rituximab (RTX) are preferred

12. Modification of targeted therapy should be performed for failure to achieve remission or low disease activity after 6 months

13. In patients with established RA, consideration of tapering or discontinuation of targeted therapy should only be made when the disease is in remission for over 12 months, especially if the patient is receiving concomitant csDMARD

14. For patients with a past history of treated solid cancer, targeted therapies may be used with caution

15. For patients undergoing major surgery, temporary discontinuation of targeted therapy is recommended and resumption of therapy when wound healing is satisfactory

16. For pregnant patients with established RA in whom disease cannot otherwise be controlled, TNFi (preferably etanercept (ETN) or certolizumab (CZP) may be continued throughout pregnancy
A cup of tea with the mentor

I am here at my mentor Dr. Mahfooz’s office for his interview. During my training under his supervision and even after that I found him a very helpful and cheerful person, who imparted clinical acumen. His way of teaching is so simple and smooth, that I never felt overwhelmed during my training and continued to absorb the knowledge he bestowed upon me. He makes Rheumatology a very simple and interesting subject for the trainees and for other doctors who enquire about any Rheumatic disease. He also has got special interest in poetry and is a well-learned person.

He was kind enough to spare some time for us. Firstly, a brief introduction of Dr. Mahfooz. Dr. Syed Mahfooz Alam graduated in 1988 from Sind Medical College, Karachi, Pakistan. He initially worked as Trainee Registrar in Orthopaedic surgery at JSMU in Karachi before leaving for USA in 1993. Got trained in Internal Medicine at Cook County Hospital, Chicago. Fellowship in Adult Rheumatology was completed in 1999 from Saint Louis University Hospital, Missouri. He returned to Pakistan in year 2000, after taking his Boards. Worked as Assistant Professor in Internal Medicine at Baqai University Hospital for one year. He later chaired the division of Rheumatology at Liaquat National Hospital from 2001-2008. He has been actively involved in postgraduate training at Liaquat National Hospital, Dr. Ziauddin Hospital and Aga Khan University & Hospital, Karachi over last 16 years and has multiple publications to his credit. Currently he is more into private & charity practice running a busy Arthritis Care Center in Karachi.

The interview

(TP - Tahira Perveen, MA - Mahfooz Alam)

TP: How did you manage to be here at the current position in your life?
MA: It was all part of my destiny. Achieving your goals requires dedicated hard work with time management.

TP: How have you learned most of what you know today?
MA: My patients are my teachers. Medicine is art and science together. You learn the science of medicine from book but the art of medicine can only be learnt by spending time with the patients.

TP: Did you have to give up anything in order to get where you are now?
MA: I had to sacrifice the golden moments when my children were growing and needed my time the most.

TP: Would you like to share the most interesting or exciting event/patient?
MA: When I saw a poor girl on a stretcher in a charity hospital and she was being treated for tuberculosis. Clinically she had prototype SLE. When I asked the parents to get some investigations done, the parents told me that they couldn’t afford a single penny. I started treating her for lupus and she lived for 15 more years but unfortunately she ultimately died of lupus cerebritis due to non-compliance when she was in remission for 2 years.

TP: What unexpected obstacles did you have to face?
MA: When I was working in a teaching institution and after 9 years of dedicated service to humanity, I was asked to generate more revenue because other specialties were making more money for the hospital.

TP: How would you describe yourself in 3 words?
MA: - Committed - Caring - Patient

TP: What is the best way to continue to learn Rheumatology?
MA: - Try to listen to your patients - Examine before looking at the previous medical records - Always be prepared to change your diagnosis

TP: What is the best way to keep updated in this field?
MA: Regularly review recent journals and attend at least one international conference yearly.

TP: What do you suggest, that the young Rheumatologists or trainees do to proceed to the next step?
MA: Commitment to the discipline of Rheumatology with interest in learning and dedication towards your patients can help you excel.

TP: Thank you for your time, Dr. Mahfooz.
The writer is Tahira Perveen Umer, Assistant Prof, Liaquat Medical College, Karachi, Pakistan.

For News & Views from APLAR MINOs and invited reports, please send to APLAR Pulse email address: aplar.pulse@gmail.com

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