

The **Lupus Academy** is a global initiative committed to provide high quality, insightful, and clinically relevant teachings about lupus through interactive meetings and eLearning, striving to provide the best patient care and improve patient outcome.

The 8th Annual Meeting of the Lupus Academy was held on 6-8 September 2019 at the InterContinental Warszawa in Warsaw, Poland. Six young rheumatologists, namely, Sorrah Fiel Briones, Ma. Theresa Collante, Mary Flor Joy Edar, Joenavin Ngo, Lorielyn Salvador, and Leonid Zamora, joined the 11-member Philippine delegation, which includes Prof. Sandra Navarra, Head of Rheumatology, University of Santo Tomas Hospital and member of the Lupus Academy Steering Committee.

The delegates were welcomed by a gentle early evening Polska rain and the opening address by Prof. Bernardo Pons-Estel and Prof. Thomas Dörner, meeting chair. This was immediately followed by a keynote lecture from Prof. Lars Rönnblom entitled **“Cytokines in SLE: Translational perspectives 2019.”** He discussed the pivotal role of BlyS, the interferons, TNF, and IL-17 in initiating and sustaining chronic inflammation in SLE. Targeting these cytokines has been successful in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and ankylosing spondylitis, however, in lupus, only belimumab has been approved as a specific anti-cytokine treatment. Studies are ongoing on JAK-STAT pathway and IL-2 as therapeutic possibilities for lupus.

One of the interesting sessions in this year's meeting is a **debate on defining SLE**. Prof. Marta Mosca emphasized that the existing classification criteria by American College of Rheumatology (ACR) and Systemic Lupus International Collaborating Clinics (SLICC) are not very specific for SLE early in the disease course and so these should be improved. She then discussed the development of the new European League Against Rheumatism (EULAR)/ACR criteria and its performance in early SLE.



Prof. Pons-Estel (Argentina) and Dörner (Germany) are co-chairs of Annual Meeting 2019.



Prof. Rönnblom is Professor of Rheumatology and Head of Department of Medical Sciences at Uppsala University, Sweden.



Prof. Mosca is Professor of Rheumatology at the University of Pisa and head of the Rheumatology Unit at the Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria Pisana, Italy.



Prof. Alarcon-Riquelme is Head of the Medical Genomics Area at the Center for Genomics and Oncological Research, Granada, Spain.

Prof. Marta Alarcon-Riquelme, on the other hand, stressed that we need a different approach for classification of connective tissue diseases. She proposed stratifying patients with lupus utilizing molecular transcriptome data and using this in planning treatment. She discussed their group's study on disease progression of three groups of SLE patients based on their longitudinal gene expression.



The first day of the meeting ended with a fellowship dinner for the faculty and delegates.

7th September 2019

The morning plenary dealt on strategies addressing **lupus manifestations and comorbidities**.

Prof. Murray Urowitz discussed **cardiovascular outcomes**. He mentioned that women with SLE have 5 to 60-fold increase risk of atherosclerotic vascular events



Profs. Urowitz (Canada), Amoura (France), and Berstias (Greece) entertained questions from the audience during the plenary. Prof. Navarra (Philippines) was the moderator of the session.

and this accounts for 3.5 to 36.4% of deaths in all SLE patients. Prof. Zahir Amoura talked about **macrophage activation syndrome (MAS) in SLE**. While it is more common in childhood, it is being increasingly noted in adults but there are no validated diagnostic or classification criteria for adults yet. MAS can mimic a lupus flare, as well infections and medication side effects, and this may cause delay in management. Treatment of SLE-associated MAS includes high dose steroids, cyclophosphamide, or etoposide. Prof. George Bertsias went through the **evidence-based treatment of SLE comorbidities** such as blood pressure control, treatment of dyslipidemia with statins, aggressive treatment and prevention of infections with antibiotics, immunizations, and hygiene measures, and management of osteoporosis and fractures.

The *Hot Topic Lecture* on **Antiphospholipid Syndrome in SLE** was given by Prof. Munther Khamashta wherein he reviewed the recently published management recommendations by EULAR. He discussed the role of low dose aspirin in asymptomatic aPL carriers, patients with SLE without prior thrombotic or obstetric APS, and non-pregnant women with history of obstetric APS only. He also said that in patients with APS with first arterial thrombosis, treatment with vitamin K antagonist with a target INR of 2-3 or 3-4 is recommended and that a direct oral anti-coagulant could be considered in patients with venous thrombosis who are not able to achieve target INR despite good adherence to vitamin K antagonist or in whom it is contraindicated.



Prof. Khamashta is a Rheumatologist at St. Thomas' Hospital, London, UK. He is currently setting up lupus services at Dubai Hospital, UAE.

There were four case study workshops and the delegates were allowed to attend two out of the four. To discuss the **management of refractory lupus using biologics**, Prof. Pons-Estel presented the case of a 34-year old female with SLE who is still clinically and serologically active despite standard of care, while Prof. Andrea Doria, presented a case of childhood-onset SLE (cSLE) with relapsing-remitting polyarthritis and another case of subacute cutaneous lupus. All three patients responded well to belimumab. This workshop identified patients who may experience remission with belimumab and evaluated short- and long-term cost-benefit of using belimumab.



Prof. Doria is Professor of Rheumatology and Head of Rheumatology and Connective Tissue Disease and Rare Rheumatic Diseases Unit, Univeristy of Padua, Italy.



Prof. Hahn is Distinguished Professor of Medicine in the Division of Rheumatology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

The workshop on **management of difficult infections** in SLE was facilitated by Prof. Bevra Hahn. Prof. Amoura presented a case of an African female with fever, malar rash, generalized lymphadenopathy, and proteinuria. Thoraco-abdominal-pelvic CT scan showed polyadenopathy and psoas abscess. Aspiration of the abscess was done, broad-spectrum antibiotics was administered, and concomitant lupus flare was treated with corticosteroids. He presented another case of a Caucasian female with severe pulmonary infection which deteriorated to acute respiratory distress syndrome. She received intensive care and broad-spectrum antibiotics.



Prof. Isenberg is the Arthritis Research UK Diamond Jubilee Professor of Rheumatology at Univeristy College of London.

The next two cases were presented by Prof. David Isenberg. The first case was a 19-year old female with malar rash, poly-arthritis, fatigue, and fever, as well as proximal muscle weakness and severe abdominal pain. The second case was that of a 41-year old female with nephritis and a history of travel to Dominican Republic of Congo.

by Prof. Khamashta. Appropriate preparation for pregnancy, effects of pregnancy on outcome, and which drugs should be withdrawn prior to conception were issues that inspired a lively deliberation. Treatment strategies for lupus flare and deep venous thrombosis during pregnancy were discussed. Unplanned pregnancy in SLE patients is potentially a difficult situation because unexpected complications in terms of both lupus and pregnancy are likely to arise.

Family planning should be an integral part of SLE treatment. A workshop dedicated for child-bearing issues was presented by Prof. Angela Tincani and Prof. Ricard Cervera and moderated



Prof. Tincani is Professor of Rheumatology at the Department of Clinical and Experimental Science, University of Brescia and Head of Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology Unit at the ASST-Spedali Civili de Brescia, Italy.



Prof. Cervera is co-founder and Head of Department of Autoimmune Diseases at Hospital Clinic in Barcelona, Spain.

Prof. Navarra is Professor and Head of Rheumatology at University of Santo Tomas, Manila Philippines.

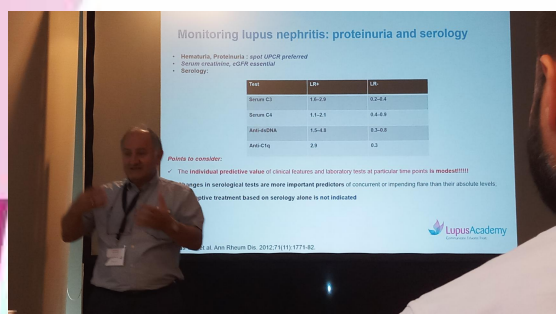


Prof. Furie is Chief of the Division of Rheumatology at Northwell Health and Professor at Hofstra Northwell School of Medicine, New York, USA.



Prof. Boumpas is Chairman of the Fourth Department of Medicine at the Attikon University Hospital, Greece.

When a discourse about lupus is ongoing, one about nephritis must not be faraway. The **Challenges in lupus nephritis** workshop dealt with a 27-year old female with thrombotic microangiopathy (TMA) presented by Prof. Richard Furie. Treatment options for TMA were explored. Patients at higher risk of developing nephritis, represented by cSLE in a male, was discussed by Dr. Dimitrios Boumpas. He presented the case of a 16-year old male hematuria and trace albuminuria and emphasized that threshold for biopsy should be low. This session was moderated by Dr. Navarra.



Prof. Doria delivered a well-received lecture on **Treat-to-target (T2T)**, **Lupus Low Disease Activity State (LLDAS)**, and **remission** as outcome measures in SLE management. He differentiated complete and clinical remission and stated that durable remission may not be as rare as it used to be. He also compared several definitions of low disease activity and discussed the strengths and limitations of physician global assessment (PGA). He ended his talk by presenting a new disease activity index named SLE-DAS.



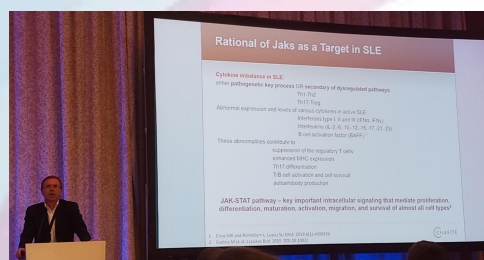
At Lupus Academy, meal breaks are not just gustatory experiences. Most of the time, they are academic experiences, too.

The evening plenary was composed of four lectures on **novel therapeutic approaches**. **Type I interferons as treatment targets** in SLE was discussed by Prof. Furie. Anti-BDCA 2 (B11B059) is a drug under development that can target both type I and III interferons. Prof. Isenberg talked about **targeting B cells and plasma cells**. Rituximab remains widely used despite failure of two clinical trials. Ofatumumab is a new anti-CD20 monoclonal antibody that is less allergenic than rituximab. Bortezomib is an anti-proteasome and preliminary results on its use on lupus nephritis are promising. The third target was **IL-12/23** and it was lectured by Prof. Ronald van Vollenhoven. Ustekinumab is an anti-IL12/23 being used for psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis, and Crohn's disease, and in a phase II clinical trial, has shown efficacy in active SLE despite



Prof. van Vollenhoven is Chair of the Department Rheumatology and Clinical Immunology at Amsterdam UMC and Director of Amsterdam Rheumatology and Immunology Center ARC, Netherlands.

conventional therapy. **Novel intracellular pathways**, particularly the Jak pathway, are being targeted as well. Baracitinib showed improvements in skin and joint manifestations of SLE. Tofacitinib is also showing early signs of efficacy.



7th September 2019

The usefulness of **biomarkers in monitoring lupus activity** cannot be discounted. However, it is recognized that the need for better ones is highest

at present. Prof. Edward Vital extensively discussed the utility of gene expression assays for interferons in stratification of therapies, predicting renal flares, and even predicting SLE onset. Another biomarker is the plasmablast, the repopulation of which has been shown to be predictive of impending relapse after B cell depletion therapy.



Prof. Vital is Associate Professor and Rheumatologist at the University of Leeds and Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, UK.

Central nervous system involvement (CNS) and mind antibodies in SLE was discussed by Dr. Harald Prüss. He stated that an important differential for CNS lupus is autoimmune encephalitis. Diagnosis is based on detection of autoimmune antibodies directed against neuronal proteins and early recognition and initiation of immunotherapy is necessary.



Dr. Prüss is group leader for Autoimmune Encephalopathies at the German Center for Neurodegenerative Diseases, Berlin, Germany.

The last part of the meeting is a roundtable discussion of three **treatment challenges in SLE**. Dr. Hahn shed light on **therapy escalation in impending flares**. Evaluation for infection should be done foremost, especially in febrile patients. **Management of refractory discoid lupus** was addressed by Prof. Kuhn. Topical corticosteroids is first-line and tacrolimus and retinoids are alternatives. Lastly, guidelines for less aggressive treatment of **membranous nephropathy** with corticosteroids and mycophenolate mofetil was reviewed by Prof. Boumpas.

Prof. Hahn gave a (million) photograph opportunity(ies) after her roundtable lecture.



Prof. Kuhn is Professor of Dermatology and Venerology and head of the Executive Department of the Management Board at University Hospital Münster, Germany.

Our sincerest appreciation to **Prof. Sandra Navarra** and **Rheumatology Educational Trust Foundation, Inc. (RETFI)** for the opportunity to take part in this conference.

Dziękuję bardzo, Polska!



Sorrah Theng Joy Joenarin Len Leo

6-8 September 2019, Warsaw, Poland, **Lupus Academy Annual Meeting**

