
Clinical Biochemistry News

May 2006



ACBI



ACB

Newsletter of the Association of Clinical Biochemists in Ireland
and the Association of Clinical Biochemists (Republic of Ireland Region)



All roads (and rail) lead to ACBI 2006

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ACBI 2006

Friday 20th - Saturday 21st October



The ACBI Annual Conference is back in Dublin this year. It is being organised for the first time by the Children's Hospital, Temple Street. The conference chairperson is Deirdre Deverell. Temple Street are no strangers to organising major conferences having run a very successful SSIEM meeting a few years ago. The venue is the Hilton Hotel, Charlemont Place, Dublin 2 (pictured above).

Major topics for presentation include:

Friday am; 'Ethical Issues'

Friday pm; 'From Molecules to Migration'

Saturday am; 'Neuroscience'

Saturday pm; 'Clinical Chemistry Interpretative Comment Scheme and Case Histories.'

The usual excellent social events will, of course, also take place.

Call for Case Histories of Interest



Have you come across an interesting case recently? Would you like it to be considered for presentation and discussion at this year's Annual Conference?

At the ACBI 2006 there will be an afternoon session on 'Case Histories' taking place on Sat 21st Oct. An expert panel will be available to lead the discussion. A brief summary of a case history should be submitted which has interesting laboratory findings, that will generate good discussion, and make a demonstrative point. The presentation of cases will require the permission of the patient's Consultant and must be anonymised.

Details of cases fulfilling the above criteria should be sent to Deirdre Deverell at the address below. The expert panel will select a maximum of six cases for inclusion in the session.

Deirdre Deverell, Chairperson, ACBI 2006 Conference Committee.

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Members' Publications

Savinov AY, Remacle AG, Golubkov VS, Krajewska M, Kennedy S, **Duffy MJ**, Rozanov DV, Krajewski S, Strongin AY. Matrix metalloproteinase 26 proteolysis of the NH2-terminal domain of the estrogen receptor beta correlates with the survival of breast cancer patients. Cancer Res. 2006 Mar 1;66(5):2716-24.

Duffy MJ. Serum tumor markers in breast cancer: are they of clinical value? Clin Chem. 2006 Mar;52(3):345-51.

[If anyone wants to highlight publication of their work they can send details to me at mhealy@stjames.ie]



In the not inconsiderable time since the last Newsletter several notable events have occurred:

Ned Barrett, formerly Principal Grade Biochemist in Limerick Regional Hospital, has been regraded to Consultant Biochemist.

Barbara MacNamara has been appointed Basic Grade Biochemist in St. James's Hospital.

The national regrading exercise which took place last year has resulted in the appointment of several new principal and senior grades. The process is not yet completed and some sites have yet to implement the recommendations.

[If there is a newsworthy item you think should be listed then let me know at mhealy@stjames.ie]

Martin Healy reports
on the annual trip to
Belfast.

Belfast Scientific Meeting March 24th 2006

The annual Belfast scientific meeting is an event looked forward to by many because of its invariably excellent programme and second-to-none hospitality. This year was no exception with about 30 people travelling from the Republic. Those going by train left a rainy Dublin in the early hours and arrived in Belfast Central in good time (a feat in itself because on many occasions in the past delays for a variety of reasons have resulted in late arrivals). We made our way to the meeting venue, the Belfast Hilton, in the rainy weather that followed us from Dublin.

The meeting was opened by Dr Maurice O'Kane (Altnagelvin Hospital, Londonderry) and the morning session got underway chaired by Dr Pooler Archbold (Belfast City Hospital). The first two lectures gave interesting and valuable overviews on the investigation and diagnosis of adrenal failure (Dr Hamish Courtney, Royal Group of Hospitals, Belfast) and the differential diagnosis of hyponatraemia (Dr Chris Thompson, Beaumont Hospital Dublin) followed by a slightly unnerving biochemistry quiz prepared and presented by Dr Peter Sharpe (Craigavon Area Hospital). Having managed to survive that reasonably intact we were then taken off for a very nice lunch laid on by the hotel.

*"An excellent
and informative
meeting. A good
time was had by
all."*

Suitably replenished we were ready for the afternoon session chaired by Dr Mike Ryan (Antrim Area Hospital). The first lecture was given by Dr Graham Beastall (Glasgow Royal Infirmary) on UK Guidelines for Thyroid Function Testing, a joint effort between the ACB, the British Thyroid Association and the British Thyroid Foundation. These are evidenced-based guidelines and are intended to guide "primary care physicians, specialist physicians, endocrinologists, and clinical biochemists" through the minefield that is thyroid function testing "in everyday language".

Next Dr Bill Bartlett (Birmingham Heartlands Hospital) gave an update on estimated GFR (eGFR). Dr Bartlett is a member of a working group charged with considering technical issues of eGFR rollout in the UK. They are liaising with UKNEQAS and are examining issues of harmonisation of serum creatinine assays and the educational aspects of eGFR use.

The final lecture of the day, an overview of analysis and clinical use of peptides, was given by Dr Joy Ardill (Royal Group of Hospitals, Belfast). The presentation addressed issues of measurement and interpretation of peptides as tumour markers in patients with neuroendocrine tumours.

After a brief sojourn to the hotel lounge for a drink and chat we made our way back to Belfast Central for the train to Dublin. Just as we thought everything was going smoothly the train broke down on the way and we had to transfer to another one. This was a 'dry' train, which ensured we arrived back in Dublin with clear heads.

An excellent and informative meeting. A good time was had by all.

Photos from Belfast





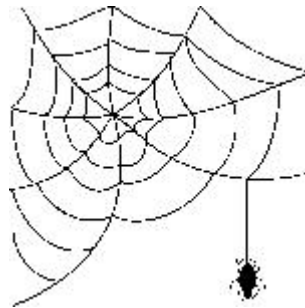
From New Scientist January 28 2006

Fentanyl, an oral analgesic manufactured by Cephalon, is described by the company as a "compressed lozenge with integral oromucosal applicator". When the package is opened you find a lollipop.

Also from New Scientist

A car park at London's Heathrow Airport has a sign which reads "Humped Zebra Crossing". The offending animal has never been seen.

A sign outside a hospital reads "Guard Dogs Operate at this Hospital". Should give you pause for thought.



Websites Worth a Look

Improving Medical Statistics and the Interpretation of Clinical Trials

<http://www.improvingmedicalstatistics.com/>

Although not pretty to look at this site sets out to expose dodgy statistics in published medical papers, particularly clinical trials and meta-analyses. Examples are given of erroneous conclusions being arrived at based on flawed study designs. Some published studies can have far reaching consequences but may be based on dubious statistical data.

Parasites and Parasitological Resources

<http://ryoko.biosci.ohio-state.edu/~parasite/home.html>

Everything you longed to know about parasites from the common-or-garden tapeworm to the schistosomes (cause of swimmer's itch!) and more. The site contains 550 images of over 180 parasites found in humans and other animals and has biological summaries of many of the pests in question. Species can be searched for alphabetically or taxonomically.

John Stafford - An Appreciation



Senior Biochemist, St. James's Hospital, Dublin. Born December 13th 1934; died November 20th 2005.

John Stafford, who died aged 70 after a brief illness, was a man of many parts.

He was born in Birmingham, England but moved to Blackrock as a child. He was educated in Willow Park, Blackrock College and finished secondary school at the Oratory in England. He attended UCD and qualified with a BSc. He worked initially as an industrial biochemist and then in a number of Dublin hospital labs, including the Metabolic Lab at St. James's Hospital under Professor Paddy Moore, Sir Patrick Dun's Hospital, National Children's Hospital, Harcourt Street, and finally St. James's Hospital, from which he retired in 1999.

He had an eclectic range of interests both inside and outside the lab. From 1979-1981 he helped organise the ACBI Conference and Exhibition and was involved again in 1992-1993. He compiled and produced the 4th and 5th register of tests on behalf of the ACBI and also compiled and produced the laboratory assay booklet (including reference ranges and sample collection instructions) for the Biochemistry Department, St. James's Hospital.

Blackrock was close to John's heart. He had a long-time interest in the local history of the area and was co-founder of the Blackrock Society and editor of its Annual Proceedings for many years. Under his guidance the Proceedings grew into one of the best of its kind in the country with its impressive array of contributors, anecdotes, and photographs of Blackrock and its South County Dublin environs. He had been working on the 2005 edition until shortly before his death. John was a very good photographer and could often be seen with camera in hand ready to catch an interesting picture for posterity. He regularly supplied photos for the Proceedings. In the last number of years he threw his energy into organising the Bloomsday celebrations in Blackrock, enticing local luminaries such as Ulick O'Connor to perform readings.

John had a life-long interest in sailing and was a member of the Royal St. George Yacht Club in Dun Laoghaire. He was a qualified Navigator and sailed regularly in both national and international waters. He was also an official measurer of the Royal Ocean Yacht Club, a task that brought him to many parts of the world.

John was a very sociable person who maintained links with colleagues in the years after his retirement. His death greatly saddened all who knew him. He is survived by his former wife, Catherine, and daughters Jane, Emma and Lucy.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam

[Martin Healy]

Geraldine Roberts - An Appreciation



Consultant Biochemist, Royal Group of Hospitals/Belfast Link Laboratories, N Ireland, born 1944; died January 9th 2006.

Geraldine obtained her primary degree in Chemistry before moving to work as a basic grade biochemist in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary in 1966. She loved her work and life in Edinburgh but moved back to Belfast to take up post in the Royal Victoria Hospital in 1968, after the death of her only sibling, younger brother Brian, from aplastic anaemia. Through running the paediatric biochemistry laboratory, she developed a great interest in inherited metabolic disease which remained a passion throughout her career, and she went on to single-handedly set up an excellent regional metabolic laboratory service in Belfast.

Her other great passion was music: a close friend from her school days described her in a funeral tribute as “intelligent, diffident, responsible and reserved in class, whilst at the piano she was confident, authoritative, passionate and accomplished”. At age 17 Geraldine won a scholarship from the Royal Academy of Music in London, and could have made a career as a concert pianist, but chose instead to study chemistry with a view to entering laboratory medicine. However music remained a huge part of her life, both as a piano accompanist and a choral singer. Skiing holidays, bridge evenings and gardening were also very important to her.

Geraldine became ill in the autumn of 2001. After some treatment she stabilised, although with very limited mobility necessitating use of an electric wheelchair, much to the disgust of this very independent lady. She resolutely returned to work, taking on a further term of office as Head of Biochemistry in one of the largest combined hospital laboratories in the UK, and succeeded in bringing neonatal screening by tandem MS to N Ireland in 2004.

However illness again overtook her; with difficulty she made it to the Society for Study of Inborn Errors of Metabolism meeting in Amsterdam, September 2004, a meeting she did not like to miss, but was forced to stop work through ill-health just a few months later. She is survived by her mother, Muriel. Geraldine will be remembered not just for her major contribution to the development of metabolic disease investigation in N Ireland and her commitment to this area, but also for her dry wit, her wisdom and for the support and encouragement she extended to those who worked with her. She will be very sadly missed by friends and colleagues in the clinical biochemistry community both locally and further afield.

[Clodagh Loughrey]