

## *Dowling Club Overseas Trip 2019*

*Report by Dr Maria Papanikolaou*

I embarked on this year's Dowling Club overseas trip to Nepal with great excitement; it was to be my first time travelling to Asia, and also my second Dowling Club trip. Nevertheless, I was still not entirely sure what to expect as the dramatic Himalayan mountaintops appeared through the clouds on our approach to Kathmandu.

The trip kicked off strong with the SODVELONCON, the annual meeting of the Nepalese Society of Dermato-Venereo-Leprosy. This included an excellent mix of talks by both Nepalese and UK Consultants and Trainees. We had a chance to hear about a wealth of topics, ranging from skin cancer to acne and pigmentary disorders. The highly informative session on leprosy, as well as keynote lectures on the microbiome, psycho-dermatology and skin & crime (!), were all undoubtable highlights of the meeting. The programme was complemented by a fantastic evening to the sounds of the local famous singer Deepak Bajracharya.

The conference was succeeded by our visit to Anandaban hospital the next day, a nationwide referral centre of excellence for the care of individuals affected by leprosy. Our tour around the centre included the artificial limb department, experimental laboratories, the physiotherapy department, and finally, the leprosy ward. The latter was a unique opportunity for us to witness the physical signs and long-term sequelae of the condition, and proved to be one of the most powerful experiences in my medical career so far. Patients welcomed us with unforgettable humility, warmth and kindness, and we were all deeply touched by the dedication of the staff members.

An exciting tour around the Bhaktapur Durbar Square later on allowed us to catch a glimpse of Nepal's fascinating history and culture.

The following day started with an early morning flight to Pokhara. The highlight of our stay there was our visit to the Green Pastures Hospital, which offers a wide range of services to the local population, and is also a referral centre for leprosy. A great one-day clinical meeting was held at the hospital, filled with interesting case presentations; possible Rothmund-Thomson syndrome, cutaneous Crohn's disease, Sézary syndrome, cutaneous leishmaniasis, dermatitis artefacta, to name a few.

After three days filled with fun, flavours and unforgettable memories, the time had come for our return to Kathmandu. We headed for the city centre, where we had a chance to try 'the best momos in the city', before our visits to the imposing Boudhanath Stupa and atmospheric Pashupatinath temple. We were also very fortunate to welcome the Nepalese New Year, right before the end of our beautiful journey.

The trip may have only lasted 10 days, but the memories and lessons learnt are lifelong. I'd like to close by thanking Dr Julia Schofield and Dr Anusha Panthagani for the excellent organisation, along with Dr Puran Gurung for his guidance throughout the trip. Last but not least, thank you BAD and the Dowling Club for this fantastic opportunity!