

Wisam Alwan

BAD/DC Travel Fellowship – Winter 2017

I was granted the BAD/DC Travel fellowship to subsidise my attendance at the 2017 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) in Orlando, Florida.

Glancing at the meeting schedule, it was easy to be overwhelmed with the breadth of the programme, with sessions running from 7.30 AM until 5.30 PM each day; but armed with the excellent AAD meeting app, I successfully managed to navigate my way through the timetable. As I am due to embark on a period of research into the skin microbiome, I had been keen to attend sessions related to this field. In particular, I was fortunate to attend the “Relevance of the Human Microbiome in Health and Disease”, led by Dr Heidi Kong from the NIH National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Maryland. The session gave a whistle-stop tour of the current evidence of the importance of microbial dysbiosis in skin disease, with a particular focus on atopic dermatitis. The talk discussed some of the proposed immunological mechanisms by which these bacteria may exert their effect and highlighted an important, recently published paper from Richard Gallo’s lab in San Diego. This article suggested an important role for commensal bacteria such as *Staphylococcus epidermidis* in skin homeostasis and a potential function in protecting against pathogenic bacteria such as *Staphylococcus aureus* in Atopic Dermatitis. This session also contained a fascinating talk by Professor Mahmoud Ghannoum on the role of fungal organisms (the “mycobiome”) in health and disease.

Asides from the research related talks, I took the time to attend sessions in selected clinical areas of interest. Specifically, infectious diseases, the acne ‘boot camp’, hair disorders and paediatric dermatology which provided management guidance in commonly encountered disorders from international experts in their respective fields. In particular, I would highly encourage future British trainees attending the AAD meeting make time to attend the “Journal Watching” session, where an expert faculty in fields such as dermatologic surgery, paediatric dermatology, dermatopathology and medical dermatology amongst others, run through the most significant advances in the literature in the last year. The Hot Topics sessions also gave a nice update with particularly useful talks on Contact Dermatitis and also on Cosmeceuticals, a field in which I had minimal experience prior to the meeting.

With almost 19,000 attendees from all over the world, it was very interesting to discuss differences in Dermatology training and practice with international colleagues. I also attended the British Dermatology Reunion event, which provided a good opportunity to catch up with a few more familiar faces! Asides from the academic side of the meeting, I also got the chance to enjoy the superb weather in Orlando, plus alongside a few fellow British Dermatology trainees, we managed to squeeze in a visit to the Kennedy Space Centre and catch an NBA game. All in all, it was an incredibly valuable and enriching trip!

I would like to thank the BAD and Dowling Club for their generous fellowship and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend this excellent meeting.