

8th Georg Rajka International Symposium on Atopic Dermatitis (ISAD) – NIHR/BAD Travel Bursary Report – Dr Emma Pynn

It was my great pleasure to attend the 8th George Rajka International Symposium on Atopic Dermatitis (ISAD) at the East Midlands Conference Centre in Nottingham from 21st and 23rd of May this year. The generous assistance of an NIHR/BAD research travel bursary enabled me to experience the event and afforded the opportunity to present a poster on house dust mite reduction for the treatment of eczema, on which subject I have recently completed a Cochrane systematic review.

The whole occasion proved an extremely enjoyable one, with a rich scientific content, plethora of internationally respected delegates, many thoughtful touches and a very sociable programme for the relatively intimate gathering of around 250, which I was told historically has been invitation only.

The programme had broad appeal to researchers, medical practitioners and patients. I particularly enjoyed the more clinical presentations, and learnt of some fascinating and practice-changing new evidence. Especially memorable was the communication from Carsten Flohr (London) regarding water hardness and eczema. He won the best oral presentation prize for speaking about his study which showed a direct link between calcium carbonate content and SCORAD that was augmented by the presence of a filaggrin mutation. He felt this suggested a direct skin barrier effect, posing an interesting area for further study and prompting lively debate. Jonathan Silverberg (USA), who deservedly scooped the first Georg Rajka Medal for best young researcher, gave several intriguing insights into atopic dermatitis, a highlight being his overview of AD and the multifactorial influences of climate. He showed that eczema is more prevalent in the Northern USA where the temperature, UV index, humidity and precipitation are lower. Results of the local BEEP (Barrier Enhancement for Eczema Prevention) feasibility study presented by Joanne Chalmers (Nottingham) have already convinced me to give high risk infants daily emollient from birth, although the main trial is awaited.

Dogs, twitter and snot (Snottingham was the original name of Nottingham it was said) also featured on the main stage. The local flavour was evident throughout, with a singing Robin Hood and Maid Marian, some even witnessed Professor Hywel Williams sporting a traditional green feathered hat...

The heritage of the meeting was focal over the three days, which were attended by the late Georg Rajka's wife, Susanne. She spoke at the conference dinner about her own and her husband's involvement in organising the event until he retired in 1995, and how in 1998 it was named in his honour. Her heartfelt talk, which was much enjoyed by the audience, came complete with photographs of key recognisable figures in dermatology and revealed that amongst other things the conference had previously hosted an Allergy Musical! She introduced the first Rajka Medal, her own initiative as a legacy for her husband. It would have been difficult to better this had we not been treated to an unforgettable musical display shortly afterwards. A very thoughtful aspect of the event was that Professor Williams had composed a great deal of the background music played at the venue, even creating a song inspired by and in tribute to Georg Rajka that he performed with colleagues in the backing line up. I witnessed a fairly unique event in seeing this joyous chorus (a number of people videoed it, so expect it on social media near you soon...) and really did appreciate the effort put in by the team to adequately commemorate a man who clearly had such a great and positive influence on both his colleagues, patients and the wider dermatological community. I will leave you with the words of Hywel Williams, best enjoyed in song:

'Rajka, we all love Georg Rajka, the future's gonna be brighter, all because of Georg Rajka, Rajka...'

Emma Pynn