

With growing delight I peered at the blurry opening line of the letter .."It's with pleasure that..." and rushed to find my misplaced glasses. Yes! I had been awarded the SAS Travel Award to attend the 11th Congress of the European Society for Contact Dermatitis in Malmö, Sweden. This had been my first attendance to the ESCD conference two weeks earlier and as such my application for the award had slipped my mind, making the letter opening a "memorable event"

The Congress, hosted by Prof Magnus Bruze and the Department of Occupational and Environmental Dermatology at Skåne University Hospital, Malmö, has evolved into a International Conference with 500 delegates from 39 countries including a large American and Japanese cohort.

The programme included a Pre Symposium Session, which dealt with occupational and non occupational aspects of exposures to common sensitizers, Key Note Lectures and more than 200 Abstracts presented orally and/or as posters. Participants had the opportunity to participate in a patch test course following the congress informing on the newest findings of standardisation, particularly concerning the application of patch test preparations and reading of test reactions.

The Social Programme was most enjoyable too, including a welcome reception and ending with a Congress Dinner at Malmö's Opera House with wonderful food and wine whilst being entertained to some selected opera. The evening culminated with conference participants enjoying dancing to a band and popular music.

I found the "free communications session" particularly interesting, as well as the focus sessions I attended. These included an update on immediate cutaneous contact reactions, adverse reactions to topical drugs, systemic aspects of contact dermatitis and consumer contact allergy.

The satellite symposium on standardization opportunities in the Patch Test Clinic, which covered allergen stability, dose determination and variability in allergen volume as well as the differences in chamber selection on degradation of volatile allergens, stimulated a broader view on what I do on a day to day basis.

I was fortunate to be invited along with a small remaining group of about 15 conference delegates who had also remained for a additional day to visit the manufacturing site of allergens in Denmark with one of the sponsors. This again was eye opening and stimulated my thinking along lines that I had not considered before, tending to focus purely on the clinical side and forgetting the science and practical considerations of production, stability and getting the test substance to the patient in a optimal condition. We were treated to a "Italian " meal and visit with guided tour to a historical castle , before being taken to Copenhagen airport for our flight back home.

I have learnt a lot, and new friends made in Sweden, enabled me to collaborate, and consequently facilitate assistance in further investigations required i.e. chemical analysis of a potential new allergen with the help of patch testing with chromatography panels.