guest editorial

ADVANCES IN ALLERGY

It is a great honour and privilege to serve as Guest Editor for this edition of the ALLSA journal, Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology. I always enjoy receiving my hard copy of the journal as, not only does it serve as an excellent source of ongoing education, but also keeps me up to speed with colleagues who remain active in our chosen field.

My selection of topics for this issue is rather indulgent as it covers the many clinical conditions in which I am interested. Likewise, I have selected contributions from those specialists, based throughout the world, whose work I admire.

A suspected diagnosis of antibiotic allergy is applied to some 15% of children, perhaps making this one of the more common allergy diagnoses. We are privileged therefore that Jean-Christophe Caubet and Philippe Eigenmann, paediatric allergists at the Geneva University Children’s Hospital, Switzerland, provide an excellent update on the diagnosis and management of antibiotic allergy in children.

Drs Cara Bossley and Ranjan Suri, based at Great Ormond Street Hospital and UCL, London, provide us with a detailed update on paediatric severe asthma. While they describe a number of advances in our understanding, assessment, monitoring and treatment of children with severe asthma, they rightly stress that basics of asthma care should remain a priority. This is prudent when considering that there are very few licensed treatments for this challenging group of children, apart from conventional asthma medications.

Dr Jacob D Kattan and Anna Nowak-Wegrzyn, Associate Professor of Paediatrics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York City, take us through an approach to oral food challenges in routine clinical practice. These diagnostic investigations are labour-intensive and not without risk, and are therefore underprovided throughout the world; however they remain an essential tool for the diagnosis and management of food allergy.

From our own service at St Thomas’s Hospital, London, we have submissions covering the topics of eczema, rhinitis, and ethics. My colleague Dr Carsten Flohr provides an update on the contemporary thinking in respect of linking eczema and allergic sensitisation. There are recent publications in this field; indeed, Carsten and Michael Perkins recently published findings from the EAT Study, again confirming that atopic eczema and disease severity are the main risk factors for food sensitisation in exclusively breastfed infants. Carsten is a rare mix of paediatrician, dermatologist and epidemiologist, and these skills harmonise to create for an interesting read.

Roisin Fitzsimons, the first paediatric allergy nurse consultant in the UK, and colleagues review our Children’s Pollen Immunotherapy Service. This is a large service and there are many lessons to be learnt with regard to providing pollen immunotherapy to children as part of a specialist allergy service.

Publications that relate to the discipline of medical ethics, especially in the field of allergy, are hard to come by. The increase in allergy research is likely to generate many unique ethical scenarios and so we are fortunate therefore that Dr Helen Fisher, specialist paediatric allergy nurse, submits an excellent review that relates specifically to the topic of obtaining assent for purposes of medical research. The argument has a British focus but also applies to the South African setting.

The late Prof Cas Motala’s legacy lives on and he certainly taught me a great many life lessons, not least of which is the African philosophy of ubuntu. The ‘spirit’ of ubuntu asserts that society, and not the individual, gives unto human beings their humanity. While ours is a small and niche ‘society’ we are charged with serving the many individuals who suffer with allergic conditions; I am therefore extremely grateful to the many contributors to this edition and hope that their hard work goes some way towards serving this noble philosophy.

George du Toit
Guest Editor