guest editorial

On behalf of the Allergy Society of South Africa it is my pleasure, as congress convenor, to welcome you to our 23rd congress held in the beautiful city of Durban. The theme of this year’s congress is “Frontiers in Allergy”. We aim to bring to you the latest advances in the field of allergy and also allow international and local researchers to share their knowledge and experience with us.

The congress this year will focus on many advances and controversies in allergy. Some of the topics covered are immunomodulation for the treatment of allergic disorders with particular focus on atopic eczema, asthma and food allergy. Mast Cell Activation Disorders are increasingly recognised by both allergologists and haematologists. The congress will focus on this, often missed, diagnosis with a talk and workshop. We are also focusing on some controversies regarding the role of probiotics and vitamin D in the treatment and prevention of allergic disorders.

A unique feature of this year’s congress is a hands-on workshop on Primary Immunodeficiency (PID) that will precede the congress. This is the 5th African School for Primary Immunodeficiency. This workshop is endorsed by the European Society of Primary Immunodeficiency. It will be conducted by local and international experts in the field of PID. The workshop will cover basic immunology and teach participants a stepwise clinical and laboratory approach to immunodeficiency disorders.

This edition of Current Allergy and Clinical Immunology (CACI) consists of articles by the international guests invited to the congress, local speakers as well as the congress abstracts.

Dr Ahmed Manjra

Mast Cell Activation Disorders are the great masqueraders which can manifest in varied, vague or vivid ways. Professor Lawrence Afrin skilfully navigates us through the maze of symptoms and diagnostic pathways of mast cell-related diseases. At the time of submitting the article, Professor Lawrence was an associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Haematology/Oncology at Medical University of South Carolina; he has recently moved to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, where I am sure he will continue to disseminate his vast knowledge in such a generous way.

The cornerstone of food allergy management is currently targeted dietary elimination coupled with astute recognition and management of allergic reactions. A glimmer of hope for more of a “cure” for food allergy has been offered recently by “food immunotherapy,” also known as “specific oral tolerance induction” (SOTI). Dianne Campbell, Professor of Allergology and Immunology at the University of Sydney and an active participant in the International Inflammation (in-FLAME) network, delights us with a review of the past and current status of food tolerance induction. Despite the hope it offers, SOTI is currently still a research tool and not ready to be translated into everyday clinical practice; whereas the “baked egg and milk” diet has become standard advice for those children with milk or egg allergy who tolerate the baked form of the allergen.

Such newer approaches to food allergy management are becoming more relevant as the food allergy epidemic strikes worldwide, seemingly also in developing countries such as South Africa. In their article on the “Epidemiology of Food Allergy”, Claudia Gray and Mike Levin from Red Cross Hospital summarise the prevalence and patterns of food allergy. Data on food allergy prevalence in South Africa are scarce, but this will hopefully be rectified as results start coming through from the South African Food Sensitisation and Food Allergy (SAFFA) study, which is currently running in the Western Cape.
Talita van der Watt, a paediatrician who is currently undergoing subspecialist training in allergology at Red Cross Children’s Hospital, sits at the coalface of practical allergology on a daily basis. She tackles the issue of the influenza vaccine in patients with egg allergy, a subject which often causes great confusion during the influenza season.

We are delighted to be receiving such interesting case reports in our regular “Case Report” section of the journal. In this issue, Debbie White, a paediatric pulmonologist at Charlotte Maxeke hospital in Johannesburg, describes a fascinating case in which food allergies are acquired by a previously non-allergic child after a liver transplant. This brings to the fore the complex interplay between allergies and immunology.

We invite you to enjoy this issue of the journal, which tackles many different topics at the frontiers of the allergy world, as well as our regular features. We thank all the contributing authors for their wonderful efforts in making this edition of the journal such an exciting one.

Dr Claudia Gray