

GUEST EDITORIAL

WHAT'S NEW IN ALLERGY?



It is my pleasure to be the guest editor for the Congress edition of the ALLSA journal. Dr Ahmed Manjra and his committee must be congratulated on organising a fantastic programme for the Congress. The line-up of outstanding international and national faculty complements the academic programme. Durban is also a warm, friendly city for a congress.

Allergy, like most medical sciences, continues to experience exponential growth in molecular biology and rapid transfer of new findings from bench to bedside. Thus the childhood atopic eczema consensus document by Manjra and colleagues is timely. It crystallises the current treatment strategies for a common problem experienced by practitioners. The use of the term 'consensus' is unfortunate as it may convey the sense that the proposed approach is the view of an expert panel. However, most of the clinical approaches to treatment appear to be evidence based, as indeed they should be. Another criticism is the lack of a treatment algorithm that facilitates rapid application of recommended treatment in clinical practice. The document places in perspective standard and newer therapeutic approaches for childhood atopic eczema.

Treatment approaches based on pathophysiology that target specific inflammatory pathways are becoming a reality. The development of anti-IgE, omalizumab, to target asthma at the upstream end of the asthma inflammatory cascade repre-

sents an advance in clinical science. The review by Dr Bob Lanier summarises the state-of-the-art knowledge for this new agent. He stresses that this is not a panacea for asthma but may provide a therapeutic option in many difficult-to-control asthmatics. Certainly the limited efficacy and prohibitive cost will probably see this drug reserved for a selected few in South Africa. Adherence to standard treatment guidelines will still control the vast majority of asthmatics. The magic bullet for asthma will continue to elude medical science for many decades.

The journal contains several other important articles and the review on lactose intolerance is informative. It is pleasing to note the regular ABC of Allergology feature and this edition focuses on testing for immediate allergic hypersensitivity. My personal view is that this an overused test in practice as most diagnoses and therapeutic decisions are not influenced by the test. The skin-prick test for appropriate allergens, if done well, remains a cost-effective test for IgE hypersensitivity when indicated. Current occupational health legislation and statutory requirements for health and safety in the workplace make the article on allergies in the workplace very apt.

Enjoy the congress and I hope you find this issue of the journal as informative as I did.

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