

# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (2003-2006)



As the triennium of the current ALLSA Executive Committee (Excom) draws to a close, as does my second stint as Chairman, it is both natural and prudent to take a moment to reflect whether the strategic objectives that we set out to achieve at the beginning of this term have, indeed, been met. These considerations are over and above many of the day-to-day

ALLSA activities which have proceeded in a smooth and effective manner; of prime importance has been the professional and hassle-free running of the ALLSA National Office, Cape Town, under the leadership of Ruwayda Adams, with magnificent support from several Excom members and Jean April. They need a special thank you right at the outset.

Four *strategic and key initiatives* were identified as being central to shaping the future of the Society and the discipline of allergology in South Africa:

- Providing education and information about allergy and asthma for its members, other health-care professionals, patients and the lay public.
- Strengthening alliances with other organisations with similar interests.
- Fostering and disseminating research and new information in allergy and asthma.
- Providing advocacy and support to ALLSA members and the patients they care for.

The first step towards implementing the strategic objectives was to restructure the *governance of the Society* into five Standing Committees and three Working Groups/Interest Sections (ad hoc committees).

**The Standing Committees and Portfolio Leaders\*** are:

- Membership Services (\*Adrian Morris)
- Education and Training (\*Sharon Kling)
- *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology* Journal (\*Heather Zar)
- Research (\*Mohamed Jeebhay)
- Policy and Advocacy (\*Andrew Halkas)

**The Working Groups are:**

- SA Childhood Asthma Working Group
- SA Allergic Rhinitis Working Group
- SA Childhood Eczema Working Group

Creation of these formal structures has resulted in better understanding, communication, co-operation and governance of the Society. I firmly believe that the restructured governance (delegated authority and empowerment are central) will also promote succession and continuity planning.

Looking back, considerable progress has been made in each of these areas, more in some than others. Let me briefly deal with each of these areas.

## EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

The Society has several educational activities including the journal *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology*, congresses, CME lectures, journal club meetings, the website ([www.allergysa.org](http://www.allergysa.org)) and dissemination of patient-education material. New developments since 2003 are the Diploma in Allergology examination and the Allergy Master Class course.

The *ALLSA journal* continues to grow in stature and receive acclamation locally and internationally – it is distributed free to almost 5 000 health professionals, including members of the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI). The journal has also been accredited by the Department of Education. Since 2003, the journal has been available on-line on our website.

Journal Club meetings are well-established in Johannesburg and Cape Town and CPD accredited. They are held fortnightly in Cape Town: meetings are interactive and very successful – a wide range of allergy/asthma topics are covered from the latest journals. Johannesburg has an active Paediatric Journal Club: meetings are held twice-monthly with videoconferencing facilities (allows interaction with a local expert on the areas under discussion) – 2-3 of these meetings focus on allergy/asthma-related topics.

ALLSA congresses have become important events in the scientific calendar in South Africa. In addition to state-of-the-art lectures and local and international research papers, the congresses now also feature case studies and review of the best allergy/asthma papers published in that year. Over the years many local and international allergy/asthma experts have participated at the Society's congresses – recent international guests include: Hugh Sampson (USA, 2003), Susan Prescott (Australia, 2004), Paul O'Byrne (Canada, 2005), Fernando Martinez (USA, 2005), Sami Bahna (USA, 2005), Bob Lanier (USA, 2005) and Emil Bardana (USA, 2005). Gideon Lack (UK), Mike Kaliner (USA) and Allen Kaplan (USA) will be international speakers at this year's congress.

ALLSA's website continues to attract considerable interest (up to 300 000 hits per month). The Society has contracted out management and updating of the website and membership database to Daniel Braude – he has done a splendid job. In addition to providing online access to the ALLSA journal, ALLSA now disseminates an e-newsletter to members who have provided e-mail addresses. The newsletter is concise, informative and has links to other allergy websites. Position statements and the revised ALLSA constitution (October 2005) are also available on the website.

The *Diploma in Allergology* examination (ALLSA played a critical role in making it a reality) is held twice a year under the auspices of the Colleges of Medicine of South Africa and continues to attract interest. Sharon Kling, current honorary secretary of ALLSA, plays a pivotal role in the organisation of this examination and many ALLSA members (executive and non-executive) serve regularly as examiners. The main objective of the Diploma in Allergology examination is to promote 'good allergy practice' in South Africa, thereby building capac-

ity of doctors with expertise in allergy. Since 2003, 16 doctors (11 paediatricians, 4 GPs and 1 ENT surgeon) have passed this examination.

The *Allergy Masterclass* Course, first introduced in 2003, has proven to be invaluable for preparation of the Diploma in Allergology examination. The course, convened by Sharon Kling, focuses on core knowledge of asthma and allergy and includes practical workshops (skin-prick testing and pulmonary function tests). It is CPD accredited, held annually and rotates between Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. The course is co-ordinated by Ruwayda Adams, ALLSA's executive secretary. The 2007 course will take place in Durban.

## STRATEGIC ALLIANCES WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

ALLSA remains committed to collaborating and working closely with organisations who have similar overlapping areas of interest. Much has been achieved in this regard. On the local scene, ALLSA held *joint congresses* with the SA Thoracic Society (SATS), the SA Critical Care Society (2003), the SA Paediatric Association (SAPA, 2004, 2006), and the National Asthma Education Programme (NAEP, 2003, 2005). A joint congress with SATS will take place in 2007 in Cape Town. Other joint initiatives: National workshop (2004) and pre-conference workshop (2005) on 'Occupational Allergies' with the National Institute of Occupational Health; collaboration with NAEP in publicising *World Asthma Day (2004, 2005, 2006)*. These kinds of initiatives have been mutually beneficial, highly cost-effective and importantly, generated much goodwill. I live in the hope that with new personalities and new blood in ALLSA and the other related organisations, a new urgency to collaborate and work closely together will prevail.

ALLSA also has well-established international links, especially with the *World Allergy Organisation (WAO)*, the *European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology (EAACI)* and the *American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI)*.

As a valued WAO member organisation, the Society enjoys the following benefits:

- Affiliation to the largest international allergy organisation in the world.
- Opportunity to host GLORIA symposiums (flagship of WAO's educational programmes) at ALLSA congresses – the Society hosted the 'Allergic Rhinitis/Conjunctivitis' module in 2001 and the 'Immunotherapy' module in 2004.
- Members receive complimentary copies of *ACII – JWAO* and discounts on *International Archives of Allergy and Immunology*, the two WAO journals.
- Complimentary subscription to WAO monthly e-letter with links to valuable resources and information.
- Opportunity to promote ALLSA through a link between the WAO website and our Society's homepage or WAO will create a web page for ALLSA.

ALLSA has supported annual meetings of the EAACI and one of its recent programmes 'Early Allergy Diagnosis Campaign' (launched in 2003 by the Paediatric Assembly of EAACI). In 2004 ALLSA established links with the Botswana Medical Association (BMA) – one of our Excom members André van Niekerk presented a lecture 'The Allergic March' and conducted a workshop at the annual meeting of the BMA. ACAAI co-sponsored the 2005 ALLSA Congress, Durban, and provided three renowned experts as speakers: Dr Bob Lanier, and Professors Sami Bahna and Emil Bardana.

## RESEARCH

Allergy-related research remains a priority for ALLSA. The society disburses at least R100 000 annually for locally relevant research in allergy and asthma – to date over R1 000 000 has been awarded for some 50 projects. These projects have been funded partly from an annual grant from GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and partly from interest derived from investment of grants from UCB Pharma and GSK. ALLSA's long-term strategy is to become self-sufficient and be less dependent on grants from the pharmaceutical industry.

Its main objective is to augment the existing research fund and eventually create an *endowment for research* (± R3 million) and use interest derived from this investment to fund projects. The research fund has already grown to an impressive R1.7 million (capital value) as a result of additional grants obtained from GSK (R300 000) and MSD (R125 000) in 2006.

The ALLSA Research Committee, under the leadership of Mohamed Jeebhay, has produced a *comprehensive report* of the various projects funded by ALLSA since 1991 and chartered the way ahead. The committee has also introduced several innovations including advertising the call for applications through bulk e-mailing to members, electronic submission of applications, utilising international reviewers, monitoring progress of projects and motivation for a travel award for junior research investigators to enable them to present their work at ALLSA Congresses. Electronic reviewing of research applications is planned for 2007.

## POLICY AND ADVOCACY

Several policy and advocacy issues were successfully handled by the Policy/Advocacy Committee under the leadership of *Andrew Halkas*. These include:

- Recommendations for Prescribed Minimum Benefits for patients (2004)
- Development of Practice Parameters for asthma and allergic rhinitis (2004)
- Motivation for increased reimbursement for Skin-Prick Testing (2004).
- Negotiation with the National Department of Health for developing a Paediatric Asthma Algorithm (2005)

Since its inception, ALLSA has been actively involved in patient advocacy issues, particularly food labelling by manufacturers. *Harris Steinman* represents ALLSA at the *Food Legislation Advisory Group (FLAG)*, an NGO body which liaises closely with the National Department of Health. More recently, ALLSA played an influential role in advocating for the correct labelling of allergenic foods and contributed significantly to the new legislation concerning food labelling – credit must go to Harris for this. More work is needed in this important area, especially with the advent of genetically modified foods.

The Society has also played a major part in developing guidelines for management of certain allergic conditions.

The SA Childhood Eczema Working Group completed the '*Guideline for Management of Childhood Eczema*' – published as a supplement in the June 2005 issue of the *SA Medical Journal* (and reprinted in *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology* August 2005). The SA Childhood Asthma Working Group is in the process of developing an addendum to the current '*Guideline for Management of Childhood Asthma*,' published in 2000 – this is timely in the light of the current 'Black Box' warning by the FDA (USA) regarding the use of long-acting beta<sub>2</sub>-agonists. The SA Allergic Rhinitis Working

Group is in the process of updating the 'Consensus Document for the Management of Allergic Rhinitis' which was published in 1996. A task group under the chairmanship of Adrian Morris produced a 'Position Statement on Skin-Prick Testing' (published in *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology* March 2006 and available on the ALLSA website).

ALLSA's role in policy and advocacy issues is evolving and needs to increase. Future goals include: standardising and promoting best practices in patient care, addressing key practice management issues and advocating on public health issues related to allergy and asthma.

An organisation such as ALLSA depends entirely on selfless efforts of many people and it's fitting that at the end of this term we acknowledge those who have contributed so much to the Society. To my fellow executive members and the many non-executive members who have assisted ALLSA over the years, I wish to pass a special vote of thanks for their loyalty and support. Many have served through personal or family crises and stresses, at times when most others would have relinquished extra burdens. I also wish to acknowledge Anne Hahn, Production Editor of the

ALLSA journal. In addition, I wish to thank members of the industry for their unqualified support of our society – not only at Congress time, but throughout the years. I am confident that they will continue to nurture the Society as we continue our efforts in this discipline.

On a personal note, I wish to thank you, the members of ALLSA, for the opportunity to serve as Chairman. It has been a busy and sometimes stressful time but there have been many rewards and the experience has been very stimulating. I would encourage members to take an active interest in the affairs of the Society and to get more involved, especially at regional level. I believe that the growth at regional level is vital to sustain the Society and to provide future leadership.

**In line with JFK's words: Ask what you can do for your Society, not what the Society can do for you!**

At this time of changing of the guard I wish the new Chairman and the new executive well and I am sure they will further advance what I think has become a strong and cohesive Society.

**Cas Motala**

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