

# GUEST EDITORIAL

## VIRUSES AND ALLERGY



It is an honour to be the guest editor of this issue of *Current Allergy & Clinical Immunology*, and I would like to express my thanks to Heather Zar and Eugene Weinberg for asking me. In the issue we mark a seminal event in the history of allergology in South Africa – the appointment of the first Full Professor in Allergology at a South African university. Paul Potter delivered his inaugural address on

'Allergy in South Africa' at the University of Cape Town (UCT) on 25 June 2009 and we are privileged to be able to include an adapted version in the journal. Paul discusses allergy and asthma in the context of South Africa, emphasising the research done in his unit to characterise allergens of local importance, particularly grasses and seafood. It is fitting that this appointment coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Allergy Diagnostic and Clinical Research Unit (ADCRU) at UCT, 21 years of the Allergy Society of South Africa, and the recognition of allergology as a subspecialty in South Africa. Paul's appointment is a tribute to his hard work and scholarship, but at the same time a recognition of the role played by the pioneers of and advocates for allergy in South Africa, all of whom Paul graciously acknowledges in his lecture.

This issue of the journal has as its theme 'Viruses and allergy'. It would not be complete without an article on rhinovirus and its link to asthma. Professor Philip Bardin has done a great deal of research on rhinovirus (including being my mentor for a local study in children!) and he and his colleagues at Monash University in Melbourne have written an excellent overview of the key questions regarding rhinovirus, allergy and asthma. They discuss the mechanisms whereby rhinovirus infects cells and causes disease, address the role of host response and whether transforming growth factor-beta (TGF- $\beta$ ) acts as an immune suppressant in rhinovirus infections, and discuss options for therapeutic intervention.

The recent influenza A pandemic affected many people, but pregnant women had a particularly high mortality (25/88 (28%) documented H1N1 cases).<sup>1</sup> Gert van Zyl reviews some of the proposed immune mechanisms responsible for increasing the susceptibility of pregnant women to viral infections.

Aneesa Vanker and Delano Rhode are fellows training in paediatric pulmonology at Tygerberg Children's Hospital, and they have written an overview of the relationship between HIV infection and allergy. There does not appear to be a direct association between HIV and

allergic disease although IgE levels are raised in HIV-infected individuals. The same principles of treatment apply as in any other allergic condition, but drug interactions may be problematic. Drug hypersensitivity reactions are more common in HIV-infected individuals and commonly involve antiretroviral drugs. Desensitisation or tolerance induction may be indicated in certain cases, e.g. in cotrimoxazole sensitivity.

My article on viral vaccination and allergy addresses adverse vaccine reactions, the relationship between immunisation and allergic disease, and the role of influenza vaccine in asthma. This is followed by an article on the ethics of vaccination. The journal editors and I are trying something new: introducing an ethics topic into each issue to stimulate interest, and to try and encourage journal readers to do the CPD quiz by offering ethics points. Please let us know whether you think this is a good idea or not!

Another article on offer in this edition is one on identification of food labelling errors by Maritza van Dyk and Irma Venter. Harris Steinman has done sterling work for ALLSA as a member of FLAG (Food Legislation Advisory Group of the Department of Health) and frequently points out problems with food labelling, hidden allergens and the potential impact on allergic patients. The authors assessed 246 product labels and found that 80% of products listed ingredients of unknown origin that may have allergenic potential!

The regular feature on ABC of allergy by Shaunagh Emanuel and Di Hawarden focuses on specific IgE testing in a well illustrated and clear approach, and the evidence-based health care article by Taryn Young looks at smoking cessation in the workplace. She takes us through the methodology of the systematic review and explains the results and conclusions that group programmes, counselling sessions and nicotine replacement were successful when compared to controls.

And finally, the wonderful cover illustration is courtesy of Shaunagh Emanuel who put her creative talents at our disposal once again!

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Anne Hahn for her patience in compiling this issue of the journal, and for her meticulous editing.

I wish you all a peaceful and restful holiday season. See you in Limpopo Province in April for ALLSA 2010!

### Sharon Kling

*Guest Editor*

1. National Institute for Communicable Diseases. Situation Update Pandemic Influenza A (H1N1) 2009 South Africa. 21 October 2009.