Sponsorship of the British Association for Cancer Research Special Conference on Breast Cancer

The British Association for Cancer Research Special Conference on Breast Cancer took place 9-11 October 2019. The venue was the iconic SAGE building (designed by Norman Foster) in Gateshead, Newcastle, with views of the River Tyne, the Quayside and the several bridges between Newcastle and Gateshead. The conference addressed ‘bridging the gap’ from basic discovery research to the clinic in several themes of breast cancer research. The conference hosted a programme featuring stellar speakers from the UK, mainland Europe and the US. We heard about exciting advances in immune therapy, understanding the biology of metastasis, particularly the role of dormancy, and, in a session sponsored by the Pathological Society, ongoing work in distinguishing harmless from harmful ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). These are areas of great importance in increasing survival from breast cancer since metastasis remains incurable and there is no way of predicting, currently if DCIS will develop into invasive breast cancer. There were talks on the application to breast cancer treatments of state-of-the-art mathematical modelling and artificial intelligence, and novel therapies such as PARP and CDK4/6 inhibitors. Some unexplored areas of research were given a session including the role of the microbiome in determining response to therapies, and metabolomics. Throughout the meeting, time was allocated to discussion of the talks and there was wide-ranging question and answer sessions following talks.

In the session sponsored by the Pathological Society “How Do we Tackle DCIS?” we heard from Prof Elinor Sawyer about recent developments in clinical research in DCIS through the Sloane project. This was followed by an overview of early progress in the PRECISION project, one of the CRUK Grand Challenge projects, delivered by distinguished breast pathologist Prof Jelle Wesseling. We then heard 2 short talks. The first was from Dr Mike Allen, from Prof Louise Jones’ group at Barts on how the microenvironment may influence DCIS progression to invasive disease, followed by Dr Carlos Martinez-Perez from the University of Edinburgh about using neoadjuvant endocrine therapy to treat DCIS.

Importantly, we selected 12 of the 80 submitted abstracts for short talks, many of which were from young researchers in training. The 2 poster sessions featured nearly 70 posters, were very well attended and led to great discussions amongst participants. In addition, we organised an evening of talks on careers and heard also from a patient advocate on how they can and should be engaged in research, which was enlightening. On the last evening of the conference, there was a chance to relax at the dinner, where several prizes were awarded for poster presentations. To close the conference, we were fortunate to have Sharon Hodgeson, MP for Washington and Sunderland West come and speak. Sharon is on the cross-party committee for cancer patients and lobbies for better access to cancer medicines so her attendance and words were highly appreciated by attending researchers.
Acknowledgment of support by the Pathological Society as a major sponsor in the conference handbook.

The conference organisers (l-r; James Flanagan, Val Speirs, Ingunn Holen and Rob Clarke pictured outside the venue, SAGE, Gateshead (left) and Mike Allen beside his poster on DCIS (right).

I am very grateful to the Pathological Society for their generous support of this conference and for helping make this such a success and for us to break even. Based on positive delegate feedback we have received, there remains a clear need for this type of specialist conference.

Prof V Speirs, 17/10/19