**Reflecting on the PathSoc Winter Meeting**

**By Amber Matkowski, University of Manchester**

I am a fourth year medical student at the University of Manchester, and the North Regional Ambassador for the Pathological Society. When I was a child I pestered my parents for the answers to questions such as 'where does my spaghetti go when I eat?' and my curiosity didn’t stop there. I wanted to know what is going on beneath the surface; to discover the things I could not see. This could have been a juvenile pipe dream but every step of the way pathology has opened doors to fascinating ways of interpreting physiological processes.

I attended the Winter Meeting held at The Royal Society of Medicine in London on the 22nd - 23rd of January 2019, intrigued to find out more about precision pathology. This was a new educational experience and my first opportunity to meet other members of the Pathological Society. Having read through the programme, I was filled with anticipation to learn about the current research being produced by exceptional academics from around the world.

Upon arrival I was met with a friendly, welcoming atmosphere. It was easy to spark up conversation and meet people from a wide range of backgrounds, at different stages in their career. The day flowed well: lectures were punctuated by coffee breaks with many opportunities to talk to other undergraduates, view posters, and get familiarised with the dynamics of a conference environment. I enjoyed thought-provoking discussions with people that have a shared passion for pathology, receiving valuable advice and feedback to inform my forthcoming research.

Innovation was a key theme underpinning the conference, sparking imagination about where the future of pathology may take us. There were talks about the recent discoveries in pharmacogenetics, which are enabling us to develop personalised medicines with increased efficacy and reduced toxicity. We learned how gender can influence the clinical presentation of disease and the subsequent response to medication. Researchers from a variety of disciplines described current efforts to understand the complexities of the human body, thinking on a molecular scale and with greater precision than ever before. With novel diagnostic techniques, new disease classification and targeted treatment, this research is revolutionising the way we approach clinical medicine. Pathology as we know it is transforming and with that brings exciting new career options. It is an excellent time to get involved and be creative.

Education is also evolving. With the integration of advanced technology, virtual reality and deep learning we are creating new and engaging ways of exploring the scientific world. Studying pathology in a virtual realm creates an immersive and dynamic learning experience, encouraging student participation and improving access to resources.

The society dinner was held at the end of the first day and made for an enjoyable evening. Spirits were high, conversation flowed, and the live music successfully coaxed everyone onto the dancefloor. The food was terrific and the entertainment was even better: with the humblest of students to the most senior academics all boogying together on the dancefloor, it certainly was a sight to behold. We turned out to be quite a talented bunch after dark (and a perhaps a few glasses of wine).

The conference was an ideal setting to contemplate the big picture and consider new perspectives. Listening to leading researchers describe their experiences first hand provided insight about their motivation and approach to research, giving it an additional dimension that is not conveyed by an academic paper. It was a place to connect with the scientific community, to exchange ideas, learn new things, and feel inspired. Conversing with different professionals gave me a deeper appreciation of how the collaboration between disciplines is integral to providing the highest standard of patient care. The way in which pathology informs clinical medicine made this conference relevant to people from various backgrounds, as we work together to achieve a common goal.

Whether your four walls take the shape of a lab, an office or a ward, it can be easy to forget that we are part of a bigger collaborative effort to make advancements in medicine. It can be refreshing to take time out of our usual daily responsibilities and remember the future we are trying to build for ourselves and our patients: they are, after all, one and the same.

I returned to student life feeling a renewed enthusiasm toward a career in pathology, reminded of what I am working toward as I near the end of my degree. Although I have a longstanding interest in pathology, this opened my eyes to the vast array of opportunities available in this rapidly developing speciality. The theme of precision pathology reaffirmed an interest in the molecular world, which I have chosen to study as an intercalated Master’s degree during the next academic year. It was exciting to hear about the amazing progress that is being made in this area and I now feel better prepared to present my own research in future.

Whether you’re considering a career in pathology or simply want to know more about the recent discoveries in medical research, I would highly recommend attending a Pathological Society meeting. It is suitable and enjoyable for people from different fields and levels of study but I would particularly encourage undergraduates to get involved and take advantage of this opportunity to delve into an evolving area of medicine. You may even have the chance to explore a new city while you’re at it.

Thank you to the Pathological Society for providing me with the opportunity to attend this meeting. It was a good networking opportunity and I left the meeting feeling inspired and ready to pursue a number of new ideas.

**Tips:**

**Arrive early.**

Registration gives you time to find your bearings, check your personal belongings into the cloakroom and get some coffee. The conversation starts here!

**Familiarise yourself with the speakers and their research.**

This isn’t essential but will help a lot if you want to network, and will highlight events that may be of particular importance to you.

**Get chatting.**

If you’ve got some exciting research in the pipeline, be ready to talk about it. Get feedback and advice from the experts, and ask about what others are doing too.

**Pay attention.**

Learn from others. What did they do well, what didn’t they do so well? Let this inform your own presentations in the future.

**Attend social events.**

They provide a great opportunity to let loose and bond with others. Just remember you’ll need to get up early the following day!

**Don’t let dietary requirements stand in your way.**

The options available to you will vary depending on the catering for a particular event but in my experience they have been very accommodating.

**Undergraduate?**

If you’re an undergraduate, look out for events specifically for you. They are designed to provide you with the best tips and tricks to support your budding career.

**Plan ahead.**

Book time off from university and arrange your travel and accommodation sooner rather than later. Make it as stress free as possible so you can really enjoy yourself. Don’t forget to utilise the bursaries that may be available to you through the society or your university.

**Have fun!**

You might be nervous but breaking through your reservations will be incredibly rewarding. Put yourself out there, meet new people, ask questions, and get the most out of this learning opportunity. Your communication skills can only improve by practicing them, which will help you to feel more confident. Remember, you’re in the perfect environment for this, where having stimulating conversation with new people is part of the culture.