

## Conference review

# Encephalitis Conference 2019, Royal College of Physicians, London 2 December 2019

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**T**HIS YEAR'S Encephalitis Conference (#encephalitisconf) was held at the Royal College of Physicians in London. Keynote speakers for the day were Associate Professor Matthijs Brouwer (Neurologist, Academic Medical Centre, Amsterdam) on developments in diagnosing infectious encephalitis, and Professor Emma Morris (Consultant Haematologist, University College London) on the role of T cell immunity in autoimmune encephalitis. With 190 delegates representing 27 countries, it promised to be an engaging and informative day.

Along with the keynote lectures were an additional 12 presentations covering a broad range of topics including tearfulness in survivors of autoimmune encephalitis, arboviral epidemics in Brazil, the relationship between age and adaptive behaviour following anti-NMDAR encephalitis, and the differential diagnosis of autoimmune encephalitis and dementia syndromes. To complement the oral presentations, attendees had the opportunity to network and view the 30 poster presentations on display throughout the day.

A presentation by Dr Audrey Daisley and Dr Rachel Tams (Consultant Clinical Neuropsychologists) from the Oxford Centre for Enablement on building resilience and coping within families affected by encephalitis was of particular interest to me professionally as a clinical psychologist, with a clear focus throughout the presentation on clinical practice as opposed to research. They spoke about the innovative work they have been doing within their service to support families,

which includes children who have a parent with encephalitis. One example of their work is a multi-family resilience building day that was run collaboratively with the Encephalitis Society and London Fire Service.

Dr Ava Easton (CEO, the Encephalitis Society) gave a thought provoking presentation on cases of vaccine preventable encephalitis in travellers returning to the UK, including rabies, Japanese encephalitis and tick-borne encephalitis, and an insight into the devastating consequences these diseases



Drs Audrey Daisley and Rachel Tams provided a psychological perspective



Professor Tom Solomon closed the conference by chairing a lively debate between Dr Nicholas Davies and Associate Professor Sarosh Irani

can have on patients and their families (Turtle et al., 2019). She highlighted the value of researching country-specific health risks before travel and the lack of awareness in holiday makers and travel providers regarding this issue. Raising awareness of how these diseases can be prevented via appropriate vaccination remains an important health issue.

Associate Professor Matthijs Brouwer's keynote presentation covered the continued evolution and development of diagnostic methods to improve timely diagnosis and thus ensure that appropriate treatment is commenced as soon as possible. New technology, including PCR multiplex panels and meta-genomics seem intriguing, and although their current limitations mean they are some way off replacing routine diagnostics, it was clear from his detailed presentation that they are likely to become more routinely used as they inevitably become more reliable through ongoing research and development. Given that accessible and timely diagnostic testing is not always available, it is a tantalising prospect that in the near future there may be such options widely available as part of routine acute medical care.

In the afternoon, a presentation on fatigue in survivors of encephalitis by Dr Luisa Diaz-Arias again piqued my interest. Dr Diaz-Arias presented data from their online study that highlighted how common fatigue is within this population, with over 80 per cent of the 500-plus respondents reporting fatigue

at an average of six years after their symptom onset. Correlations were found between fatigue and depression, as well as fatigue and sleep quality. An interesting finding that sparked a number of questions from the audience was the higher frequency of fatigue reported by women compared to men.

Following the presentations, Professor Tom Solomon chaired a lively debate between Dr Nicholas Davies (Consultant Neurologist) and Associate Professor Sarosh Irani concerning whether intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIG) treatment should be used in all suspected cases of autoimmune encephalitis, which generated many questions and much discussion amongst the audience. This approach to a topic was a really novel experience for me and I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to experience the clinical reasoning that must be involved in deciding on the best course of medical management when working in the absence of consensus guidelines regarding the optimal treatment regime, as is currently the case within autoimmune encephalitis. In fact such was the power of the information presented that a quarter of the audience were persuaded to change their mind, with a final count of nearly 70 per cent endorsing the use of IVIG in all suspected cases of autoimmune encephalitis.

Another unique and neat touch throughout the conference was the live Twitter feed displayed beside the presentation screen, which made it very easy to see what thoughts and questions were being generated by the audience throughout the day.

As the conference came to an end, awards were presented for the best oral presentation (Dr Frederik Bartels on failure of brain growth in children with MOG antibody-associated encephalitis), and poster presentation (Dr Giuliano Tomei on anti-neuronal membrane antibody associated psychosis). Professor Tom Solomon received a well deserved lifetime achievement award and was also announced as the new President of the Encephalitis Society whilst Professor Barbara Wilson steps to one side and becomes President Emeritus. Rachael Tarlton received



Dr Ava Easton, the Encephalitis Society's Chief Executive Officer, presented a well-deserved longstanding volunteer award to Rachael Tarlton

the longstanding volunteer award for her continued commitment to the Society.

Ava closed the day with a call to action to continue raising the profile of encephalitis around the world, with a particular focus on World Encephalitis Day on 22 February 2020 ([www.worldencephalitisday.org](http://www.worldencephalitisday.org)). A wine and cheese reception completed a fantastic and stimulating day.

Overall, the day delivered a well rounded and thought provoking series of lectures, including aetiology, medical management and psychological intervention. The debate was very well received by the audience as a whole and brought a unique aspect to the conference. In addition to the quality of the oral and poster presentations, the event itself ran smoothly which is undoubtedly a testament to the hard work and attention to detail by all those involved in the planning and execution of the event. I would recommend this conference highly to anyone with an interest in encephalitis

or, like me, a desire to learn more about this arguably lesser known neurological condition.

To find out more about Encephalitis Conference 2020, please register as a professional member of the Encephalitis Society to be kept updated on the call for abstracts, prizes, bursaries and the conference itself. Registration is free. Go to [www.encephalitis.info/Pages/Category/membership](http://www.encephalitis.info/Pages/Category/membership)

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### Reference

Turtle, L., Easton, A., Defres, S. et al. (2019). 'More than devastating' – Patient experiences and neurological sequelae of Japanese encephalitis. *Journal of Travel Medicine*, 26(7), taz064.