

VOICE OF APLAR

ISSUE 03



News from the Asia Pacific
League of Associations for
Rheumatology



26th Asia-Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology Congress

Suntec, Singapore | 21-25 August 2024



Singapore
Society of
Rheumatology



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On behalf of the
APLAR 2024 Local Organising Committee*

The 26th Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology Congress (APLAR 2024) was held in Singapore from August 21 to August 25, 2024, at the Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre (SUNTEC). The total number of attendees was 1915.

The local organizing committee (LOC) formed from the Singapore Society of Rheumatology curated a scientific program in line with the Congress theme of "Bridging Countries, Forging Progress." This was well received, and many delegates gave very positive feedback that the scientific content was interesting and engaging.

OPENING CEREMONY (AUGUST 22, 2024)

The opening ceremony began with a traditional LED dragon performance with live percussion.



Professor Tsutomu Takeuchi, president of APLAR, then gave the opening speech, followed by a moving tribute to the late Professor Debashish Danda, immediate past president of APLAR.

A cocktail reception for all attendees followed.

MAIN CONGRESS (AUGUST 23-25, 2024)

Scientific Program

The 6 plenary lectures and speakers were as follows:

Artificial intelligence (AI) in rheumatology

Ernest Choy (*United Kingdom*)

Cardiovascular risks in rheumatic diseases

Lai Shan Tam (*Hong Kong*)

What is the next revolution in therapeutics in inflammatory arthritis?

Andrew Cope (*United Kingdom*)

Critical challenges and solutions in osteoporosis when charting the path of a silver tsunami

Kenneth Saag (*United States of America*)

Advances in understanding and treating vasculitis

Carol Langford (*United States of America*)

Neuropsychiatric systemic lupus erythematosus (NPSLE)—how to make significant impact from weak evidence?

Anselm Mak (*Singapore*)

There were also 14 specific scientific topic sessions, 21 special interest group sessions (including 1 American College of Rheumatology [ACR] symposium and 1 European Alliance of Associations for Rheumatology [EULAR] symposium), 7 abstract sessions, and 12 industry-sponsored sessions. A special SSR-MSR (Singapore Society of Rheumatology–Malaysian Society of Rheumatology) session featuring the 24th Feng Pao Hsii Lecture “Systemic Autoinflammatory Diseases—From childhood to adulthood” by Prof Raphaela Goldbach-Mansky from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) was also held.

In total, there were 171 speakers, with a male-to-female ratio of 61:39, comprising 20 from the United States and Europe and 151 from the 6 APLAR regions: Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, n = 2), East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan, n = 40), Oceania (Australia and New Zealand, n = 11), South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, n = 25), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, n = 67), and Western Asia (United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, n = 6).

PRE-CONGRESS WORKSHOP (AUGUST 21-22, 2024)

All workshops were well attended despite the nominal fee charged to cover the high cost of rental and catering.

| Course | Dates | Registered participants |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ultrasound workshop * | August 21-22, 2024 (2 full days) | 76 |
| Vasculitis workshop: | August 22, 2024 (half day) | 20 |
| GRAPPA workshop * | August 22, 2024 (full day) | 58 |
| Scleroderma workshop * | August 22, 2024 (full day) | 68 |
| Immunology workshop | August 22, 2024 (full day) | 65 |
| BMD workshop | August 22, 2024 (half day) | 41 |
| Lupus workshop in collaboration with Lupus Academy | August 22, 2024 (half day) | 85 |

* Included hands-on demonstrations with patients.



Ultrasound workshop



Scleroderma workshop



GRAPPA workshop

APLAR YOUNG RHEUMATOLOGISTS (AYR) PROGRAM

A dinner was held on August 23 and a fun run on August 24, both of which were well attended.

Social Events

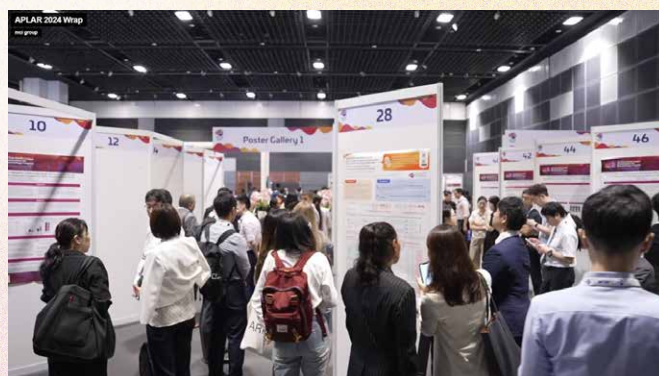


PRESIDENTIAL AND GALA DINNER (AUGUST 24, 2024)

This was held at Shangri-La hotel.



Interaction and engagement of delegates was also enhanced through their participation in painting a batik (a traditional cloth dyeing technique using wax resist) banner and the provision of teh tarik (hot milk tea poured from one container into another) and ice cream in the poster-viewing area.



Poster-viewing area

The LOC was delighted that delegates enjoyed the meeting in its entirety, for both the scientific and social activities, especially as this is the first time that Singapore has hosted an APLAR Congress. The Singapore Society of Rheumatology would like to express our thanks and gratitude to APLAR for awarding us the honor of hosting APLAR 2024.

A record number (1425) of abstracts were received, of which 1044 were poster presentations and 40 were oral presentations.

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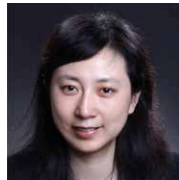


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THE GRAPPA WORKSHOP ADJACENT TO THE APLAR 2024 SINGAPORE

By Dr Himantha Atukorale Convenor, APLAR Young Rheumatologists

The Group for Research and Assessment of Psoriasis and Psoriatic Arthritis (GRAPPA) has hosted a pre-congress workshop adjacent to the APLAR congress since 2015. This year, the GRAPPA workshop was held on August 22, 2024, and partially sponsored by Novartis Singapore. It was a full-day course featuring numerous interesting topics that aimed to provide updates to and education about the best care and management practices for psoriatic arthritis (PsA).

This year, the GRAPPA workshop was chaired by A/Prof Katy Leung (Singapore), along with Prof Ashish Jacob Mathew (India), A/Prof Mitsumasa Kishimoto (Japan), Prof Lai Shan Tam (Hong Kong), and a young GRAPPAian, Dr Satoshi Kawaii, from Japan. More than 60 participants signed up for and attended the workshop.

The workshop started with a brief introduction to the mission of GRAPPA in promoting education and research for care for PsA. A/Prof Leung started the workshop on "Remission,"

which is the current goal of treatment. Although doctors and patients may have slightly different views in remission, the benefits and feasibility of remission have been emphasized. Prof Tam continued with the importance of achieving remission and its benefits on cardiovascular outcomes.

A special feature of this year's program was a competition that invited the submission of interesting cases. Ten

cases were received, and 3 were chosen for presentation by Dr Dinithi Rupasinghe (Sri Lanka), Dr Prassanna Dogga (India), and Dr Thilakavathiny Muniapan (Malaysia). These cases represented PsA cases that are difficult to manage in daily practices and highlighted specific care needs among patients with PsA in the APLAR regions. Both faculties and participants provided invaluable input into solving the challenges faced in

managing these cases. This was followed by in-depth discussions on the obstacles faced by care providers in helping patients with PsA achieve remission, as well as possible solutions. These truly interactive sessions were well received and allowed participants to exchange views on best possible care and narrowing the gap between aspirations and clinical feasibility in real life.



Another interesting topic was SAPHO syndrome (Synovitis, Acne, Pustulosis, Hyperostosis, and Osteitis), which has substantial overlaps with psoriatic disease. A/Prof Kishimoto discussed the current classifications of SAPHO syndrome and pustulotic arthro-osteitis and the possible treatment strategies. Dr Kawaii, the young GRAPPAian, illustrated a typical live case of SAPHO. The morning session was completed by Prof Mathew, who concisely demonstrated the must-know magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) features of spondyloarthritis. This session was highly praised, and participants indicated they would love to learn more. An online portal was used for a follow-up quiz to reinforce the MRI features learned in the short course.

The day cannot be completed without mentioning the afternoon workshop, in which 8 patients with PsA joined to illustrate the signs and examination techniques. We

are grateful for the participation of these patients. The practical hands-on workshop was facilitated by A/Prof Katy Leung (Singapore), Prof Mohammed Haroon (Pakistan), Dr Colin Theng (a renowned dermatologist from Singapore), Prof Ashish Jacob Mathew (India), and A/Prof Mitsumasa Kishimoto (Japan), in the 5 assessment sessions for (1) arthritis/dactylitis, (2) axial spondylitis, (3) psoriasis and nail, (4) enthesitis, and (5) radiography. Participants were divided into 5 small groups, and each was given a chance to see the signs and participate in polishing their examination skills.

Overall, it was an interesting and fulfilling day for both faculties and participants. The GRAPPA would like to thank APLAR for the opportunity to collaborate with hosting the event and hope to bring more to improve care for the patients with PsA in upcoming APLAR congresses.



(A) The workshop was well attended. **(B)** Dr Kawaii (young GRAPPAian) presented a case of SAPHO syndrome. **(C)** Snapshot of the workshop. **(D)** Dr Colin Theng (dermatologist from Singapore) taught skin scoring in the workshop.

A GARDEN OF KNOWLEDGE FOR ASIA-PACIFIC RHEUMATOLOGY

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On August 9, 2024, Singapore celebrated its National Day of Independence. This beautiful country is known as a "Garden City"—an ideal from founder Lee Kwan Yew to create a green city space where a multiethnic, multicultural country can flourish beyond the limits of their small island. Train stations are multilingual, tourist attractions are so fun, and the food is as diverse as it is delicious—from laksa, samosa, chicken rice, and, of course, nasi lemak to the kaya breakfast toast with soft runny eggs.

As we land in Changi Airport, our colleagues begin the preconference workshops for immunology, GRAPPA, ultrasound, and scleroderma. These workshops provide hands-on experience on skills that they may not be familiar with or just for a refresher (or preliminary teaser) for the conference ahead.

The opening ceremony brings us both the hope of luminescent dragons and a heartfelt video in remembrance of the legacy of a beloved leader, Past President Professor Danda. We picked up our badges and hardcopies of the Voice of APLAR—ready for new beginnings.

The word rheumatology came from a Greek word meaning that which flows/flowing current [of a river]. This is so true, as rheumatology is fast-paced and changing every day. For example, the summary slides of Professor Carol Langford



Image 1.
Nail Capillaroscopy Workshop
(Photo from Dr Francis Cuenca)

were updated within the 4 months between APLAR and the Vasculitis Conference in Barcelona. This coming October or November, many new textbooks will be arriving with their new editions. Many biologics or biosimilars that are being displayed now are not even in our old textbooks yet. Thus, it is very important to stay up to date on these conferences.

The conference also addressed region-specific challenges unique to the Asia-Pacific area. The region's cultural and linguistic diversity, genetic variability, and economic disparities highlight the necessity for APLAR-specific guidelines. A notable advancement was the introduction of APLAR's first-ever management guideline for psoriatic arthritis, presented by Dr Katy Leung from Singapore. This milestone underscores



Image 2.
Hard copy of Voice of APLAR issue by the authors—who were past APLAR exchange awardees for EULAR and ACR.

APLAR's commitment to developing standards of care tailored to the Asia-Pacific region's distinct clinical and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, the Reproductive Health SIG and the Sjogren's Syndrome SIG underscored the critical need for cross-center collaboration to establish evidence-based practices that address the unique needs of the Asian population, further reinforcing APLAR's role in advancing rheumatological care in the region. A review of the APLAR Gout Registry was also presented by the Gout SIG. Did you know that 33% of the patients self-reported that their triggers were beans? What other misinformation or misconceptions are common in the Asia-Pacific?



Some APLAR Young Rheumatologists “make rheum” for some healthy running to kick off the second day!

The APLAR Young Rheumatologists (AYR) also held a quiz show that enabled everyone to participate using an online platform. “Gamification” in medical education is one of the things that can change the landscape of teaching. One of the answers was mentioned during the Genetics SIG lecture of Professor Suleman Khan. Sometimes, there’s “rheum” to think outside of our boxes and we can try going to

sessions that are not what we are used to because we might end up finding them interesting—or make us win quizzes.

No conference is complete without an in-depth exploration of global rheumatology trends, with significant insights highlighted during the “Year in Review” session. A recent study published in The Lancet Rheumatology revealed that although

rheumatoid arthritis prevalence remains highest in high-income countries, there is a troubling increase in lower-income regions. This rise may be attributed to factors such as elevated smoking rates and rapid urbanization. It is essential to maintain a balanced perspective, considering both global trends and regional specifics, to effectively address the diverse challenges in rheumatology.

The APLAR also awarded several institutions as Centers of Excellence. In Image 3, author LST—a past regional exchange program scholar—reconvenes with Dr Yuichiro Fujieda from Hokkaido University, where she had done a 2-week rotation to learn more about antiphospholipid syndrome. We hope our AYR colleagues apply to these new institutions and meet new friends!

The closing ceremony at APLAR 2024 celebrated several outstanding abstracts across various research domains. Congratulations! These studies presented valuable insights and advancements in the field, reflecting the caliber of research showcased at the conference. One noteworthy abstract, from our colleague Dr Takumi Saito from Juntendo University School of Medicine in Japan, was titled "Double Filtration Plasmapheresis Reduces Type I Interferon Bioavailability and Inducing Activity in Plasma from Patients with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus." The study found that double filtration plasmapheresis significantly reduces plasma levels of anti-dsDNA antibody titer and type I interferon (IFN-I) bioavailability in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). This reduction was not observed



Image 3. Looking forward to JCR's hosting of APLAR 2025! LST with Dr Yuichiro Fujieda, speaker on Antiphospholipid Syndrome from Hokkaido University

in STING-knockout reporter cells, indicating that the STING pathway, activated by anti-dsDNA antibodies, plays a crucial role in IFN-I bioavailability. Despite the relatively small sample size, these findings highlight a promising direction for future research on therapeutic approaches for SLE. Find out more about his work, which was recently published, in *Immunological Medicine*. Perhaps we envision future APLAR conferences where we can see the abstracts beforehand and plan more meet-ups before the actual event.

The Asia-Pacific—or APLAR—is in some ways like Singapore. Take the Gardens by the Bay, which houses 19,000 species of plants, many sourced from different continents. Our APLAR is home to 2,300 languages—with roman (and non-roman) letters, syllabaries, and pictograph origins. We are separated by more bodies of water and islands, unlike our Western colleagues. Even our social media is so diverse—from YouTube, Naver, and Weibo to LINE. Our identities and voices are as unique as our species of flowers, leaves, fruits, and their trees.

But at least, once a year, we gather in a symbiotic conference to bloom and flourish. We look forward to next year when these voices cross paths again in Fukuoka for APLAR 2025.



Image 4. Best Abstract Awardee, Dr Takumi Saito from Juntendo University School of Medicine

¹ <https://www.rheumatologyph.org/what-is-rheumatology>

² <https://www.bbc.com/storyworks/travel/garden-of-wonders/gardens-by-the-bay#>



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To,

Date: 2nd September 2024

The President

APLAR.

Dear Professor Takeuchi,

I am thankful to have received the APLAR Masters award given posthumously to my husband and for the video played at the inaugural ceremony of APLAR Congress 2024. My gratitude to the entire association which are having members from different countries cannot be expressed in words. It is with immense joy that we announce the launch of the "Dr Debashish Danda Foundation" (DDF). The legacy of late Professor Debashish Danda continues to inspire us deeply, even in his absence. He was an admirer of Rabindranath Tagore (Indian Nobel Laureate in Literature) who quoted "Life is given to us; we earn it by giving it."

The profound honour, respect, and empathy expressed through various events, awards, speeches, and letters by members of the association have illuminated our lives during a dark period. These gestures have highlighted what a remarkable human being he was and the significant impact he had on the medical fraternity and his patients. This inspiration has led us to establish the foundation in his memory.

At present the foundation is unable to accept international funding. However, till then we would be delighted to receive your contributions in the form of ideas related to patient care, education, and research—areas where Professor Danda's innovative ideas have made a global impact.

We will keep you updated regarding the activities and ways to participate and hope to get your valuable ideas to move forward.

Thank you for your support and involvement.

With warm regards

Yours sincerely

Sumita

On Behalf of DDF

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Highlights From the 27th Annual Conference of the Pakistan Society for Rheumatology

Prof Babur Salim, Prof Amjad Nasim, Dr Saira Yasmin

The Pakistan Society for Rheumatology (PSR), founded in 1995, has been a prominent platform for promoting knowledge and expertise in rheumatic diseases throughout Pakistan. Over the years, PSR has gained recognition for its successful annual scientific meetings held in cities such as Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. These events have attracted esteemed rheumatologists from around the world while fostering the development of local experts in the field.



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PSR 2024 Highlights

In September 2024, PSR successfully hosted its 27th Annual Conference at the picturesque PC Hotel Bhurban, situated in the scenic hill station of Murree, Pakistan, on September 20-21, 2024.



Prof Amjad Nasim



Prof Babur Salim

Conveners of the Conference

A Scenic and Inspiring Venue

The **PC Hotel Bhurban** offered the perfect setting for the conference, providing a serene environment that was both inspiring and conducive to intellectual exchange while enjoying the beauty of nature.



A Transformative Learning Experience

The 2-day conference featured an enriching program of keynote speeches, panel discussions, and interactive workshops led by esteemed experts from various medical disciplines. Attendees gained invaluable insights into the latest advancements in rheumatology

through cutting-edge research and presentations on new treatments, technologies, and patient care strategies. The conference catered to a wide range of professionals, from seasoned experts to emerging talent in the field.





Prior to the main conference, **preconference workshops** were held on **September 19, 2024**. These sessions provided attendees with immersive learning experiences, offering hands-on training and skill development in key areas of rheumatology.



Preconference Workshops: A Hands-On Learning Opportunity



Abstract Submissions and Presentations

Abstract submissions for the conference closed on **July 31, 2024**, and many national and international researchers participated by presenting their latest work. The scientific program showcased a wide array of innovative research on rheumatic diseases, from groundbreaking

clinical trials to advancements in patient management. The presentations were a testament to the growing body of work being done in Pakistan and around the world to combat these challenging conditions.



Special Incentives for International Delegates

A highlight of the conference was the special incentive for international delegates. PSR offered a 100% registration fee waiver to 20 participants with accepted posters. This initiative allowed international researchers and practitioners to participate in the conference free of charge, including full access to the scientific

program, exhibition hall, welcome and gala night events, conference bags, and all meals throughout the event. The support for international delegates helped foster global collaboration and made the conference accessible to a wider audience.



PSR Young Rheumatologists (AYRs With the AYR Convener)



Speakers and Delegates



Looking Forward

With great success, the 27th Annual PSR Conference has once again demonstrated the critical importance of collaboration in the field of rheumatology. It has set a new standard for future meetings and has proved to be a cornerstone for continued progress in understanding and treating rheumatic diseases. The next upcoming meeting will be organized in Lahore in 2025. Prof Ahmad Saeed (president of PSR) will be the convener of the conference.

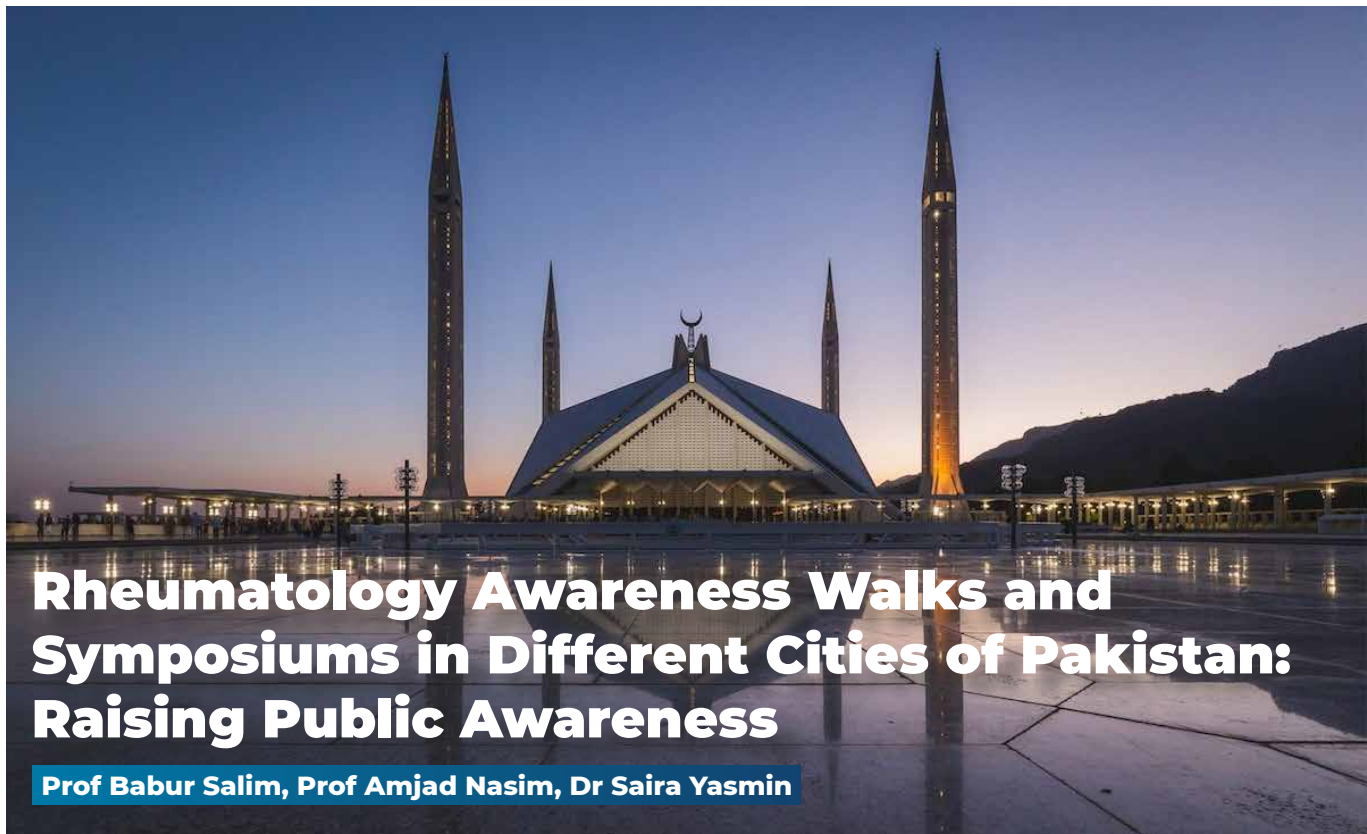
We thank all the delegates, speakers, and sponsors who contributed to making this conference a resounding success. PSR looks forward to hosting many more transformative events that will continue to advance rheumatology in Pakistan and across the globe.



PSR 2024 Organizers

Entertainment Activities in PSR 2024





Rheumatology Awareness Walks and Symposiums in Different Cities of Pakistan: Raising Public Awareness

Prof Babur Salim, Prof Amjad Nasim, Dr Saira Yasmin

The Pakistan Society for Rheumatology is a pioneering platform that was formed in 1995, with a view to enhance knowledge about rheumatic diseases in Pakistan and to encourage further development of expertise in this field.

The Pakistan Society for Rheumatology is actively dedicated to raising awareness about rheumatic diseases among both the general public and health care professionals. To achieve this, various departments of rheumatology across Pakistan have organized

awareness walks and symposiums. These initiatives aim to educate people about the symptoms, prevention, and treatment of rheumatic conditions while enhancing the understanding and diagnostic capabilities of medical practitioners. Through these efforts, the society strives to promote early detection and effective management of rheumatic diseases nationwide.

Below are key highlights of the awareness activities held across Pakistan in 2024.



WORLD JUVENILE IDIOPATHIC ARTHRITIS OBSERVED AT PIMS HOSPITAL ISLAMABAD



LUPUS AWARENESS WALK HELD AT NATIONAL HOSPITAL LAHORE



WORLD ARTHRITIS DAY SYMPOSIUM AT CDA HOSPITAL ISLAMABAD



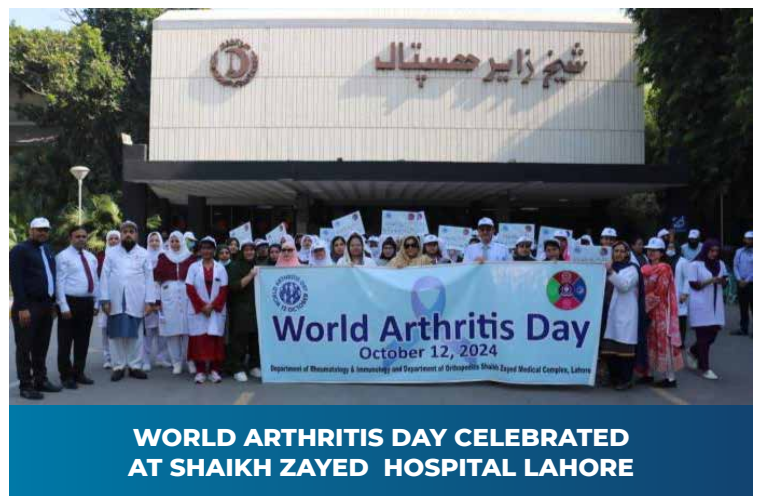
WORLD SCLERODERMA DAY AT FAUJI FOUNDATION HOSPITAL ON JUNE 29, 2024



WORLD ARTHRITIS DAY AT BAHAWAL VICTORIA HOSPITAL BAHAWALPUR



WORLD ARTHRITIS DAY WALK AT POLYCLINIC HOSPITAL



WORLD ARTHRITIS DAY CELEBRATED AT SHAIKH ZAYED HOSPITAL LAHORE



REPORT ON THE 18th ANNUAL CONGRESS OF THE IRANIAN RHEUMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION

The 18th annual rheumatology congress of the Iranian Rheumatology Association was held November 6-8 at the Tehran Olympic Hotel Convention Center. This year's program featured:

Symposiums:

- **Jaw Osteonecrosis**
- **Dermatology and Mucosal Manifestations**
- **Neurologic Manifestations of Rheumatic Diseases**
- **Malignancy and Rheumatic Diseases**
- **Regional Pain and Periarthritis**
- **Challenges of Pregnancy and SLE**
- **Low Back Pain and AI Considerations**

Workshops:

- **Musculoskeletal Ultrasound**
- **Capillaroscopy**
- **Bone Density**
- **AI in Rheumatology Practice**

A notable speech on “Resilience in Complex Conditions” was delivered by a psychiatrist to the Iranian Rheumatologist group.

In this congress, approximately 250 rheumatologists attended, and 19 pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies sponsored the event, fostering better relationships and enhancing the congress's quality.

Best regards,

Mohsen Soroush, MD, Rheumatologist

President of the Iranian Rheumatology Association



EXPERIENCE OF INTRODUCING “INFRARED THERMOGRAPHY” FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEPAL

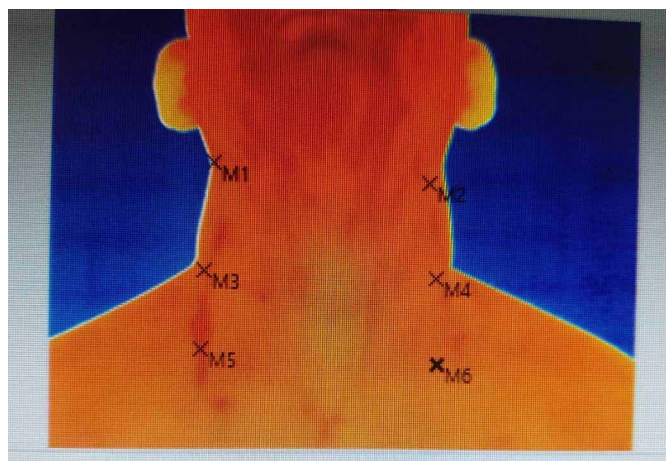
Dr Manisha Bhochhibhoya & Dr Binit Vaidya
National Center for Rheumatic Diseases (NCRD), Nepal

Musculoskeletal disorders in Nepal encompass various conditions that contribute significantly to disability, work absenteeism, and reduced productivity. Accurate diagnosis is crucial for initiating appropriate treatments and assessing treatment efficacy.

The National Center for Rheumatic Diseases (NCRD), one of the tertiary rheumatology centers of Nepal, introduced the facility of infrared thermography in the year 2023 on the occasion of the center’s 10th anniversary. The head of the rheumatology department, Dr. Binit Vaidya, led a team that included five rheumatologists, the NCRD management group, and technicians. They actively worked to set up the thermography room, establish the recommended

temperature settings, and standardize thermal imaging procedures. Dr. Binit himself did the technician training, reporting format, and interpretation of thermal patterns.

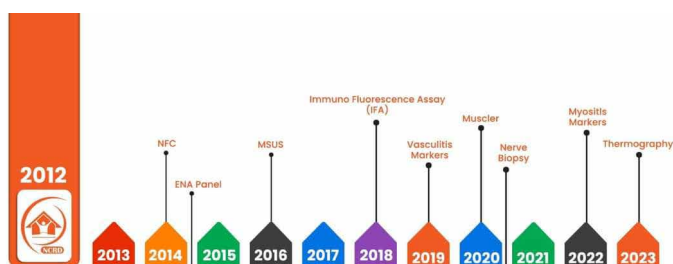
Applications of thermography started with the aim of pain assessment, inflammation detection, and monitoring the disease progression. Although subjective patient assessment is valuable, objective diagnostic methods are essential for precise monitoring. Diagnostic imaging is crucial in confirming clinical suspicions and understanding the extent of musculoskeletal damage. The necessity of the use of thermography was perceived when patients with fibromyalgia became skeptical about the diagnosis and management of the condition. The satisfaction in the patient

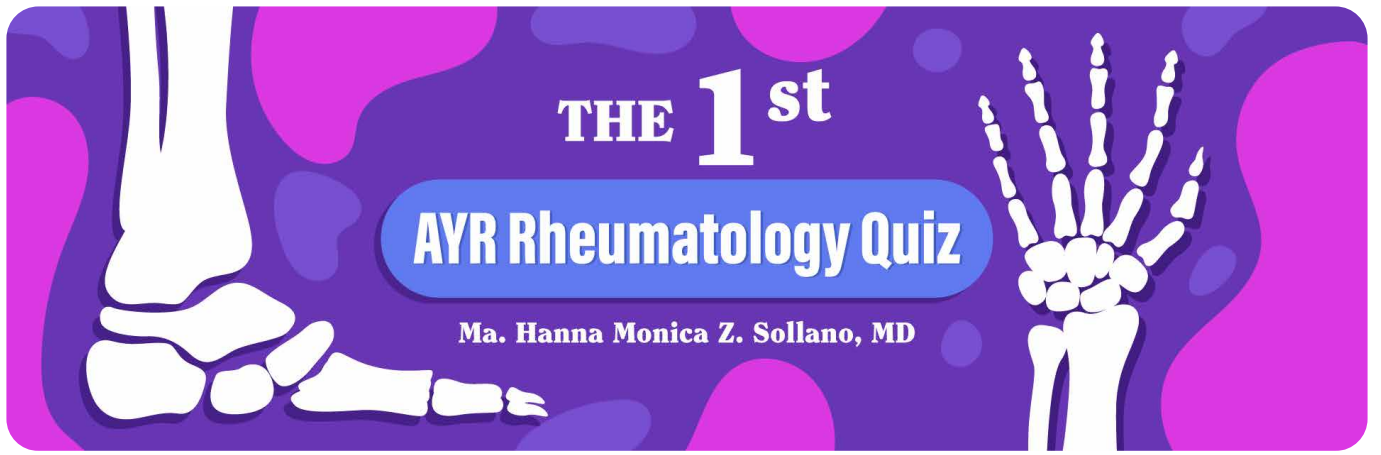


with fibromyalgia as they can now interpret their pain in patterns was priceless. This prevented many female patients from seeking psychologist and psychiatrist consultations. Along with active fibromyalgia, we were able to detect vascular insufficiencies, breast lesions, Raynaud disease in digits, acute gouty arthritis, neuropathies, and focal myopathies. A case of relapsing polychondritis presented in the NCRD outpatient clinic. She was diagnosed in India by fluorodeoxyglucose uptake in a positron emission tomography (PET) scan in bilateral nasal alar cartilage and the external auditory canal. The C-reactive protein

was normal, and the PET scan, not being available in Nepal, was not able to be monitored. Thermography was conducted, and it could detect thermal uptake elevation in nasal cartilage compared with the rest of the nasal area.

Thus, from our experience of a year of conducting infrared thermography, we can conclude that it can be a valuable adjunct to traditional imaging methods in diagnosing and monitoring musculoskeletal disorders. Its noninvasive nature, cost-effectiveness, and ability to assess physiological changes make it a valuable tool in the field of medical diagnostics and rehabilitation.





The AYR spearheaded many new activities this year. Aside from welcoming new board members and establishing AYR ambassadors, the first AYR-organized fun run was held along with the 1st AYR Rheumatology Quiz. The AYR wanted to create a fun and relaxed activity for not just AYR members but anyone who wanted a bit of a breather from the lectures and to maybe even make new friends. After months of preparing questions, brainstorming, and even having practice runs for the online version of the quiz, the show was ready to roll on

August 24, Saturday of the congress weekend.

Questions in the first 2 rounds of questions varied from trivia about the different APLAR countries to APLAR's history as an organization. The final round of questions covered different topics relevant to rheumatology, from disease entities to modes of diagnosis and different treatments. With the help of Steven Chan from the APLAR secretariat, the quiz was presented via Slido, an online quiz application that made the participation process

smooth and convenient. Dr Tanveer Hasan and myself were assigned as this year's quiz masters, but credit must also go to the AYR Quiz Committee composed of Dr Himantha Atukorale, Dr Priscilla Wong, Dr Babur Salim, Dr Ghita Harifi, Dr Chuan-Hui Xu, and Dr Binit Vaidya.

There was a surprisingly good turnout of participants from different APLAR countries, with everyone staying from start to finish even if their names did not appear in the leaderboard. After 3 grueling rounds of questions,

we finally had our winners. It was a close fight, but in third place was Dr Genki Kidoguchi from Japan, and second place belonged to Dr Lisa Traboca from the Philippines. Coming in first place was Dr Antonio Quiambao as our top scorer, also from the Philippines.

The event's success was possible because of everybody's openness, good will, and enthusiastic participation. We are hopeful this will become an annual event we can look forward to at each congress.



AYR Quiz in full swing



AYR Board Members after all the AYR festivities



First place winner Dr. Antonio Quiambao from the Philippines being awarded by AYR Co-Convenor Dr. Ghita Harifi



2nd place winner Dr. Lisa Traboca from the Philippines being awarded by AYR board member and quiz master, Dr. Tanveer Hasan



3rd place winner Dr. Genki Kidoguchi from Japan being awarded by AYR board member and quiz master, Dr. Hanna Sollano

EMERALDS AND PEARLS IN THE LAND OF THE RISING SUN

Ma. Hanna Monica Z. Sollano, MD - Philippines
Cindy, MD - Indonesia
Perdana Aditya Rahman, MD - Indonesia
Faisal Parlindungan, MD - Indonesia
Shuntaro Saito, MD, PhD - Japan
Yasushi Kondo, MD, PhD - Japan



International fellowships are always a good idea. There is much to gain and very little to nothing to lose. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused much delay in these fellowships, and preparations were put to a halt. But in 2022, international fellows slated to attend Keio University Hospital in Tokyo finally got the emails that Japan was open and ready to welcome them.

I was fortunate enough to spend a year at Keio University Hospital under Professor Yuko Kaneko and her esteemed staff. I focused mostly on musculoskeletal ultrasound with Dr Yasushi Kondo and Dr Kazuoto Hiramoto, but I was also required to attend and participate in weekly conferences. On top of reporting on and discussing cases, I also participated in data collection and analysis

for some research projects under the guidance of Dr Shuntaro Saito and Dr Jun Kikuchi. It was definitely a very enriching experience—professionally and personally.

While I was still adjusting to living in Tokyo and figuring out my routine in a new country and workplace, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that a group of Indonesian rheumatologists were also going to have their fellowship at the same time as mine. Adi, Cindy, and Faisal were on a research fellowship under Dr Katsuya Suzuki. I was very excited to meet and get to know them once I found out they had arrived. It was very comforting to have other foreigners to explore and experience Japan with. Coming from Southeast Asian countries, we seemed to share a similar culture and approach to our new environment, which cured

any homesickness I may have been feeling at that time. We also made friends with a researcher from China, named Zheng Xu. She completed our little group of international fellows in Keio.

Cindy shares, “It was a great opportunity to be able to learn from the best experts in rheumatology. I am so grateful to be allowed to participate in their daily activities, such as case discussion, journal reading, laboratory session, polyclinic, musculoskeletal ultrasound, and capillaroscopy. I was observing their physical examination and how they made a decision regarding the treatment. (It was) such a valuable experience for me to improve my knowledge and skill in rheumatology.”

Adi also mentioned, “We learned a lot from Keio and were very impressed with how the rheumatology fellows still managed to do patient services while also producing research projects.”

Faisal more accurately describes their own unique experience, especially in the research laboratory. “During the laboratory sessions, I was greatly helped by Dr Keiko, the head of the rheumatology laboratory, and by Ms Ikeda, the laboratory staff. They taught me how to do cell culture, ELISA, FACS analysis, mRNA extraction, RT-PCR, and qPCR analysis!

Since I was only in Japan for 3 months, it wasn't enough time for me to do extensive basic research using animal models or human samples. However, it was possible for me to do all the laboratory training using cell lines. I was grateful because Professor Suzuki, Dr Keiko, and Ms Ikeda went the extra mile to make sure I was able to have laboratory training,” he shares.

We were very enthusiastic about experiencing how rheumatology was practiced in a different population with a different economic and cultural landscape. It was refreshing and exciting to be given access to the inner workings of an institution that is a well-known APLAR center of excellence. Faisal also recounts one of our many inspirations—“We were particularly taken by the Keio immunotherapy center and how it was efficiently managed and ensured that patients got their prescribed biologic agents. I learned a lot about the system and workflow of their immunotherapy center! This was a very precious experience that I could try to adapt in Indonesia.”

I believe the appreciation was mutual. Dr Saito states, “They all participated in clinical practice with a sincere attitude toward learning about the treatment of rheumatism and collagen diseases in Japan, eager to



(L to R): Dr Kondo, Faisal, Adi, Dr Saito, Cindy, and Hanna

learn as much as possible. They also showed interest in basic research and participated in it.”

Dr Kondo also said, “I was inspired by their positive and enthusiastic attitude as I shared with the fellows the clinical and research skills I had developed in Japan. Their questions and discussions helped me to develop my own understanding of rheumatology, which often differs in approach from other regions. Having the

opportunity to share my experience and knowledge as a rheumatologist in Japan with my overseas friends was very impressive. Learning and working with 4 Asian fellows from different backgrounds gave me new perspectives and knowledge.”

The exchange of knowledge surpassed that of rheumatology—any chance to practice English was welcome—“I believe it was a good stimulus for Japanese doctors in our department, who are not very proficient in English,” Dr Saito continued.



(L to R): Hanna, Adi, Cindy, Dr Akiyama, Faisal

We also made it a point to have fellowship even after work. We had different schedules, but we would usually meet up after our last hospital engagements for the day and explore the city. We would exchange notes on which sites to see, which areas had the best deals for souvenirs, and what food or Japanese products we had to try. We also made good connections with the medical students, the residents, staff, and other rheumatology fellows. We were even able to share some Filipino and Indonesian food with our Japanese colleagues. Dr Kondo made it a point that we experienced some local Japanese traditions. “Spending the time with the fellows was a great opportunity for me to learn, and I tried to make it a worthwhile experience for them as well. Not only that, but it was also a great pleasure for me to share traditional Japanese culture with them, such as touring Japanese famous places and going to local festivals together!” he recounts.



(L to R): Zheng Xu, Hanna, Faisal, Adi

By the time our fellowships ended, I knew I made new lifelong friends. “We are also very grateful that we maintained relationships not just as rheumatology fellows but also as friends. We truly had a wonderful time at Keio, and we look forward to more joyful meetings in the upcoming APLAR events,” Adi also shares.

Hopefully our experiences encourage other young rheumatologists to apply for exchange programs or seek out similar opportunities. Exchanging ideas, knowledge, strategies, and experiences across the world are key in further

advancing the young and vigorous science of rheumatology. “New experiences, global knowledge, and international networking are so important to keep us updated about what’s new in rheumatology, to be a benchmark, and of course it will give me new names to be called my teachers, my colleagues, and my friends in rheumatology all over the world,” states Cindy when asked why these opportunities are important. “I hope these wonderful relationships will continue through APLAR’s grants and exchange programs,” Dr Kondo also echoes. Maybe this means that our adventures have only just begun.



(L to R): Faisal, Professor Kaneko, Cindy, Adi



(L to R): Dr Saito, Hanna, Dr Takeuchi



Dr Kondo and I at an MSUS workshop



(L to R): Faisal, Hanna, Cindy, Adi