We Have Come So Far

Year 2003-4 was an active year for the Hong Kong Society of Rheumatology (HKSR). In addition to the 10th annual scientific meeting (ASM 2004), we had six rheumatology related educational meetings, in the form of scientific symposia, round table or special inter-hospital meetings, with lectures by local and international speakers on various rheumatology related topics. We were able to sponsor members directly or indirectly to attend major international rheumatology meetings – EULAR 6/2004, APLAR 9/2004 and ACR 10/2004. Members continue to receive the Hong Kong Bulletin on Rheumatic Diseases and a newsletter, each published twice a year by the Society. The Society also maintains a web-site.

We work closely with various local organisations towards the interest and benefit for patients with rheumatic diseases. Two well-received patient seminars were organised with the joint effort of Hong Kong Community Rehabilitation Network (CRN). An educational VCD on ankylosing spondylitis (AS) has been produced with the joint effort of Hong Kong Arthritis & Rheumatism Foundation (HKARF), CRN, AS Association and B27 Association. This VCS is the third produced by the Society after the ones on Systemic Lupus Erythematosus and Rheumatoid Arthritis. These VCDs have been distributed to our members and patients.

The Society is a member of the Federation of Medical Societies of Hong Kong (FMSHK) and the Asia Pacific League of Associations for Rheumatology (APLAR). We participated in the HUAXIA Congress on Diagnosis and Management of Rheumatic Diseases, now a tri-annual meeting, hosted in turns by rheumatology associations of Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong. The 3rd HUAXIA Rheumatology Congress was held in Taipei in 12/2004 and a HKSR delegate of over 20 members attended the meeting. HKSR maintains a close relationship with the Guangdong Rheumatology Association and council members of the Association/Society had a get-together dinner during APLAR 2004 in Korea.

As I reflect on the growth and accomplishment of the Society over the 3 years of my presidency, I could not help but to thank the council members for their innovation, enthusiasm, and dedication for the Society's functioning. I am also grateful to my predecessors, Dr. KH Chan, Professor Edmund Li, Dr. RWS Wong and Professor CS Lau, for their unfailing presence and advice. They have laid the foundation stone for this Society with determination and perseverance since the Society's inauguration in 1987. They have also established a link with international and regional rheumatology organisations.

I have been a full member of the Society since 1995; and served the Society as Council Member (1996-1997), Honorary Secretary (1997-2001) and President (2001-4). There was just a handful or so of full members when I joined the Society. It was a small Society with a friendly Council. I was soon recruited by Dr. RWS Wong (HKSR President, 1994-1997), as a council member for an expanding Council; and hence started my years serving the Society. As honorary secretary of the Society, working closely with Professor CS Lau (HKSR President, 1997-2001), the Society became an important training ground for my rheumatology career. It was my honour and notable achievement to be later elected and served HKSR as its President.

During my three years' presidency, we celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the Society in year 2002. To mark this celebration, we started numbering the Society annual general meeting (15th AGM in 2002) and annual scientific meeting (8th ASM in 2002). The naming of the years was based on that the Society had its inaugural scientific meeting in 1987 and started regular yearly ASM since 1995.
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Since 2002, the ASM has become a full day function with a morning session on Free Paper Presentation aiming to encourage conduction of quality, rheumatology related, scientific search and clinical studies in Hong Kong. In the same year and there after, we have the participation of industry sponsors in hosting exhibition booths during the ASM, shaping the meeting towards a full scale.

Over last 3 years, the number of Society members increased from 113 to 198. The increase was mainly due to an increase of associate members after we hosted a rheumatology certificate course for allied health professionals. The number of full members has also significantly increased to a total of 36 at the time of writing, due to an increase of rheumatology trainees completing training and becoming specialists in rheumatology. Over this time, the Society revenue reserve has tripled, thanks to the contributions from industry sponsors hosting exhibition booths during annual ASM.

Hong Kong experienced local and international; economic, health and social turmoil in the last few years. The Society had to adjust to different challenges during hard times. In year 2001, members had to cancel attending the American College of Rheumatology meeting due to the USA 911 incident. One of the 2001 ASM speakers, Dr. Walter G. Barr, also cancelled his talk and trip to Hong Kong. The epidemic of SARS in year 2003 was devastating to Hong Kong. The Society had to cancel one spring scientific symposium, was not able to attend the Guangdong Rheumatology Association Annual Meeting, and had to postpone the Rheumatology Certificate Course for Nurses.

Fortunately, we have seen a turn around to better times in Hong Kong in the last few months. As I step down from my presidency, I trust that Dr. TH Chan, HKSR President 2004-5, and his council will be able to sustain and carry on the mission of this Society, that is, to promote the interest and standard of practice in rheumatology. Our young full members will be a fearless team to pass on the traditions of this Society for generations to come.

The 10th ASM was successfully held with an excellent attendance. It is my wish that the Society will continue to serve the interest of a growing number of members, and expand the coming ASM. It is time to put away hesitations about inviting regional and or overseas speakers for our meetings; and contact with internationally, regional and local rheumatology associations is to be strengthened.

We have come this far as my presidency draws to a close. I would follow the foot-steps of my predecessors; continue to serve the Society in the capacity of ex-officio and past president. My congratulation, warmest welcome and best wishes go to Dr. TH Chan and the Council 2004-5. You all have a very successful new year.

Emily Kun