

ABS International Forum visit to Nairobi, Kenya

The Association of Breast Surgery (UK), was approached by Miriam Mutebi on behalf of the Aga Khan University - Nairobi, Ministry of Health of Kenya, and National Cancer Institute of Kenya to participate and help with a 'Breast Surgery Preceptorship Education and Outreach Summit' and the 'Second Annual International Breast Cancer Symposium' in Nairobi, Kenya in August 2019. The ABS agreed to take this on under the auspices of the newly formed International Forum. A team of Breast Surgeons, Plastic Surgeons and a Consultant Nurse to include John Benson, Ruth James, Dayalan Clarke, Maisam Fazel, Rajiv Dave, Dorin Dumitru, Charles Malata and Victoria Harmer were involved with this exciting venture.

The three-day Preceptorship Summit, which was attended by 30 local surgeons, was highly ambitious and very effective. The first day involved a day of didactic lectures, a Multidisciplinary meeting with the UK and local faculty discussing interesting cases from the local institutions, followed by practical workshops. The workshop included delegates using olives to demonstrate getting a fine needle aspirate from an axillary lymph node, learning the correct way to mark a mastectomy specimen using ink and a boneless chicken fillet and the chance to localise the sentinel node in a manikin using sentimag and the probe.

Day two saw us at the University Surgical Skills Centre for a cadaver-based workshop. Short talks on basic oncological and breast reconstructive procedures were followed by live marking on volunteers and then a chance for the delegates to perform the procedure under supervision of the faculty on the cadavers. The ability for the delegates to perform basic procedures on cadavers with tips and guidance from the faculty was greatly appreciated. There was an excellent talk on the role of the breast specialist nurse and the importance of keeping the patient at the centre of the care package, which was a concept the local delegates were not too familiar with.

The last day of the summit was a technical challenge with the delegates at the conference centre watching live operations being performed at the Aga Khan University Hospital. The UK faculty performed a range of simple and complex benign breast and breast cancer related surgical procedures during the day in two operating theatres. A narrative was heard from the faculty as surgeons both in the operating theatre and in the conference room commented on the techniques used and the rationale for the chosen procedures. Following the live operating, the faculty returned to the conference centre for the closing session and the award of certificates of participation. The feedback from the delegates was extremely encouraging with a request for a similar course on a regular basis.



The Second Aga Khan University Hospital Breast Cancer Symposium followed the Preceptorship Course. This 2-day meeting was set up with the theme of “Implementation of Breast Cancer Management Guidelines in Resource–Limited Settings”. Benjamin Anderson, Chair and Director of Breast Health Global Initiative, gave the keynote address. This meeting contained didactic lectures on each aspect of breast cancer - from radiology, screening, treatment, survivorship, palliative care and nursing. Challenges in the breast cancer field were also discussed.

There are approximately 850,000 new cases of cancer in Africa annually and around 600,000 deaths in the same period. The mortality to incidence ratio of people diagnosed with cancer in Africa averages 73%, compared to 44% in Europe. Globally a woman dies of breast cancer every minute; the disease is the most diagnosed cancer and most common female cancer. In Africa breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death, and women in Kenya are more likely to present with advanced breast cancer than those in the UK (approx. 60-80% of cases).



It was illustrated that there are other challenges with breast cancer in Africa. This included a lack of knowledge, lack of breast awareness, highly variable income levels, poor resources and poorly trained and inadequate numbers of staff. These challenges are partnered with huge inequalities of healthcare provision in Africa. A very small proportion of people pay for a healthcare package, few employers pay into a healthcare package whilst the majority of the population have neither of the above. There is little doubt that women having to pay for their health care is the reason for them presenting at a much later stage of breast cancer – as they fundraise for their treatment. Another problem is that there are very few radiotherapy centres in Africa (n=160 in the whole continent!). Sixty per cent of these radiotherapy centres are found in South Africa and Egypt, which means 29 out of 52 countries have no facilities at all. In Kenya there are eight radiotherapy machines; six in private hospitals and two in public hospitals, all situated in the capital, Nairobi. This has huge implications for the choice of operations given to women diagnosed with breast cancer, as many may be required to undergo a mastectomy, as radiotherapy after breast conserving surgery would not be an option. It is calculated that 38 more machines would be needed in Kenya alone for recently formulated guidelines to be implemented.

In all this gloom, there seems to be some light at the end of the tunnel. Improvement is on its way – African countries are accelerating cancer advocacy and attempting to standardise cancer care. They wish to continue to provide and increase palliative care services, increase access to effective treatments, support quality cancer care through the development of services in neglected areas such as histopathology and psychology. There is to be a National Cancer Control Program booklet launched soon and we hope that the ABS in UK will continue our collaborative work, with the vision of improving patient care both in Kenya and in the African continent. The UK faculty had a very enjoyable and enriching experience in Nairobi – new facts were learned, knowledge and skills were shared and friendships forged. Our thanks to the ABS and to Miriam Mutebi, the local organiser.

Victoria Harmer & Dayalan Clarke

on behalf of the Kenya Faculty of the ABS International Forum