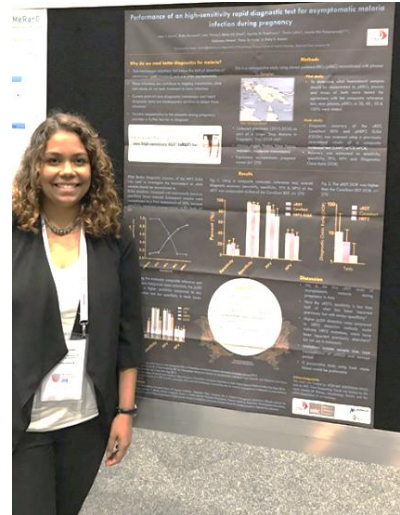


Vera Unwin, Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine

The 1st Malaria World Conference, Melbourne, Australia, 1st – 5th July 2018.

In the first week of July 2018, I embarked on the 52 hour round trip journey to Melbourne, Australia for the 1st Malaria World Congress. In a bid to accelerate malaria elimination through collaborative action, the congress brought together key stakeholders, including academics, policy makers, industry and those in affected communities. It was eye-opening to learn about malaria control strategies from so many different perspectives.

Excitingly, one of my abstracts had been accepted as an oral presentation. I talked about a new molecular test for insecticide resistance in mosquitoes, which we had developed on a new handheld, portable point-of-care device called the Genedrive. It was my first time speaking at an international conference and really boosted my confidence in public speaking. I also presented a poster about another study of mine, trialling a new rapid diagnostic test for malaria in pregnant women in Indonesia. Different people popped by to chat about it- industrial diagnostics manufacturers, World Health Organisation policy advisors and other research scientists working on diagnostics. It was a hot seat crash course in communicating with people from different career backgrounds. It was incredibly rewarding to use my findings to advise other people in their own research, while gaining feedback and insights from world-leading experts. I quickly got used to the awkwardness that is “networking” and by the end of the week I had acquired a tall stack of business cards!



In malaria diagnostics, it is crucial to keep up to date. I normally follow the latest technology, changing health policies and shifting epidemiology by regular trawls through online literature. At the congress, I learnt that there is a wealth of unpublished knowledge- details in methods, challenges encountered etc that are only ever divulged during coffee breaks. It was an ideal opportunity for me to learn exactly what research is being prioritised and where funding is being directed. Ultimately, I hope that this will help focus my fellowship applications next year.

Prior to the congress, I gave seminars at the Walter & Eliza institute and the Burnett institute, and took time to visit the impressive biospectroscopy facilities at Monash University. I met with group leaders to chat informally about their research and upcoming opportunities. I would highly recommend this to anyone attending overseas conferences, especially if the host institutes are as welcoming as they were in Melbourne. It helped build my confidence and relaxed me before my talk at the congress. Plus, it was great to make a few friends who were also attending the congress the following week.

Overall, attending the congress was invaluable- I met people who do not normally attend the other conferences in tropical medicine and I'm much more confident talking to senior professionals. Thank you to the RSB for funding my travel, without which my trip would not have been possible. I have been a member for over a year now and thoroughly encourage others to apply.

