



Irish Thoracic Society

President's Update

2021 has been another difficult year for the respiratory healthcare community and for healthcare in general. The ITS has continued to work hard to provide support and guidance in response to the challenges of COVID-19 as well as fulfilling our strategic aims under the four pillars of Advocacy; Education and training; Research and Membership Services.

Education

Thanks to all those involved in organising, chairing, speaking, presenting and sponsoring at the ITS Virtual Annual Scientific Meeting. With its excellent line-up of topics and expertise I know the meeting is keenly anticipated throughout the respiratory healthcare community. It is our 3rd educational event of 2021, following on from the ITS Case Study Forum & Spring Meeting in March and the Inaugural ITS ILD Educational Meeting which took place in September. Both featured presentation of highly interesting cases with excellent keynote lectures by Dr Chris Barber and Dr Elisabetta Renzoni respectively. Thanks to the organisers, speakers, panellists, chairs, presenters and sponsors for all their input and efforts in making these meetings such a success.

The ITS Flashcard series has been an innovative and beneficial addition to the ITS educational offering. Developed by ITS Educational Officer, Dr Sarah Cullivan, with input from colleagues across the respiratory community, these provide practical up-to-the minute information and guidance on a range of topics including lung transplant, COPD, pulmonary embolism, pulmonary hypertension, Lymphangioleiomyomatosis, Cystic Fibrosis, Non CF Bronchiectasis, PFT, Air Quality – to name but a few. For anyone who missed the bi-monthly releases via twitter, they are all available to view on the ITS website. With thanks to support from GSK the ITS was able to offer educational opportunities in the form of bursaries to the virtual ERS and BTS meetings.

Advocacy

We continued to advocate for respiratory healthcare services through the media and through engagement with the HSE, the National Clinical Programme Respiratory and other stakeholders. A survey of ITS members carried out in late 2020, provided an insight into the scale of the challenge faced as a result of COVID-19 and we have continued to convey this message throughout all our engagement. We also highlighted challenges in non-Covid care particularly in the areas of COPD, lung cancer and TB. We issued a press release for World TB Day 2021 highlighting the significant public health risk posed by TB and calling again for the appointment of a National TB Controller. We highlighted a study carried out by ITS Members on the largest prison outbreak of TB documented using Whole Genome Sequencing. We were pleased to receive assurances at a recent meeting with Dr Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer, that the role of a National TB Controller is in the process of being implemented.

Research

The ITS was delighted to launch our 7th call for research proposals in the Health Research Charities Ireland (HRCI), Health Research Board (HRB) Joint Funding Scheme. Awards will be announced next Summer with projects to start in Autumn 2022. This grant is to the value of €100,000 over two years and is made possible thanks to support from GSK. The Asthma Research Bursary, administered in conjunction with the Asthma Society with support from Novartis was launched in the Spring with the winner soon to be announced. There are plans to reignite the ITS ILD Registry, which has been on pause, throughout the pandemic.

Membership services

Membership of the Society grew in 2021 thanks to the ongoing expansion of the respiratory healthcare sector. New members are attracted by the broad range of activities that the Society undertakes on behalf of its members and benefits such as access to information, educational and research opportunities. The dual membership agreement with the European Respiratory Society, which we renewed in 2021, is also a significant draw. While providing considerable benefits to members individually it also reinforces the long-standing and mutually beneficial collaboration between the two Societies in the areas of respiratory education, science, advocacy and leadership. COVID-19 has brought the value of such partnerships into sharp focus as we respond to new challenges and adapt to new ways of working, learning and collaborating.



Dr Aidan O'Brien
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