



ISAPP Reaches Out To India Report submitted by Gregor Reid September 18, 2008

Although ISAPP has actively participated in research symposia in Asia, most notably the August, 2008 meeting in Indonesia, it organized its first official symposium in the region this past September 13th, in Delhi, India.

Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Francisco Guarner in establishing a collaboration between ISAPP and the American Gastroenterology Association, Asia Pacific Disease Week, and the Indian Society of Gastroenterology, a symposium titled “Probiotics and Prebiotics in Gastrointestinal Health and Disease” was organized.



Left to right: Dr. Harsharn Gill, Dr. Gregor Reid, Dr. Henry Binder (AGA) and Dr. Francisco Guarner.

An audience of over 150 specialists was welcomed by ISAPP President, Dr. Gregor Reid, who noted that a global organization like ISAPP is committed to working with developing countries to convey the latest scientific information about probiotics and prebiotics, and to try and find ways for well documented products to reach children and adults in most need. Still each day, in Asia, thousands of children die from diarrheal diseases. Along with hydration therapy, probiotics have been shown to help recovery from such ailments, yet patients and caregivers do not have access to them as of yet. This need must be addressed.

Dr. Harsharn Gill explained what a probiotic is, and illustrated the unfortunate fact that numerous products are on the Indian market calling themselves 'probiotic', when in fact they fall far short of meeting this definition. He urged manufacturers to perform clinical studies and ensure that formulations were appropriately prepared in terms of microbial speciation, lack of contamination, and sufficient viable counts at end of shelf life.



Dr. Reid was a late replacement for Dr. Jim Versalovic who had to remain in Houston due to the pending arrival of Hurricane Ike which threatened his home and required his attendance at hospital. Dr. Reid provided a range of examples of how probiotics function, especially in the intestinal tract. He explained the basis for their use in gastroenterology, and at distant sites influenced by the mucosal immune system.

Dr. Guarner gave examples of successful usage of probiotics and prebiotics in gastroenterology practice and how such knowledge could be applied to practice in India and other countries in the region.

The session was limited in duration, which was unfortunate as the line up for questions to the speakers was sizeable. The event clearly stimulated much discussion and interest and could have gone on much longer. Having said that, as participants left the auditorium, news came in that five bombs had gone off, two in relatively close proximity to the hotel, and this led to many people making for home in some haste. It provided a reminder of the fragility of life, the challenges faced by countries with a degree of political instability or which are targets for terrorist attacks, yet it did not dampen the feeling of the speakers that health and well-being of people has no boundaries.

In the end, ISAPP made an important step in conveying good science and clinical practice with colleagues in Asia. The sharing of knowledge is two-way, and it would be our hope that we can continue the dialogue to stimulate more research and development on probiotics and prebiotics in the wider Asian region.



Of note, a very special thanks to Sanofi-Aventis whose on-the-ground support of the ISAPP visitors was outstanding, and to Danone for their contributions towards flight costs and distribution of information about the event.