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Brief Communications

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A few memorable vignettes from my recent visit to Melbourne

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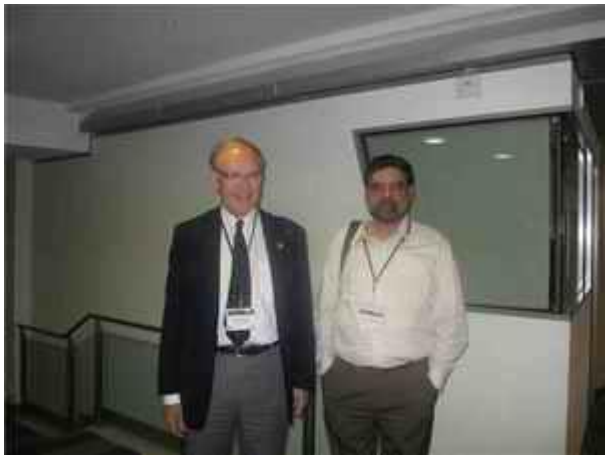
I wish to share with the readers of your esteemed journal a few memorable vignettes from my recent visit to Melbourne (Australia) where I was a sponsored delegate in the Inaugural Global Toxinology Conference (Global Issues in Clinical Toxinology) organized by the Australian Venom Research Unit of Melbourne University, held from 23-28 November 2008.

Prof. David Warrell & Dr. V. V. Pillay at the Conference venue. [Please click picture to enlarge]



The main organizers are eminent snakebite researchers, who are very well known in the field, and include Dr. Ken Winkel, David Williams (who so kindly arranged for my sponsorship), and Prof. Julian White. In addition, there were some of the other giants of toxinology: Prof. David Warrell

(Oxford University), Dr. Jose Maria Gutierrez (Costa Rica), Prof. P. Gopalakrishnakone (Singapore), Prof. Jean-Philippe Chippaux (Bolivia), Prof. Joao Luis Cardoso (Brazil), Prof. Bart Currie (Australia), Dr. Geoff Isbister (Australia), and many others, whose works I had read with awe and respect, and never imagined that I would ever meet in person!

My participation was fully sponsored by AusAID, and I was accommodated free of charge in a lovely hotel (Ibis Hotel) within walking distance of the venue: The ICT Building, University of Melbourne. Incidentally, when I visited Bangkok (Thailand) in 2007 for a WHO meeting, I had the pleasure of staying in one of the branches of the same hotel chain.

Picture of Gila Monster at the Melbourne Reptile Park (inside the Zoo) - Picture taken by Professor Pillay [Please click picture to enlarge]



On the first day (23 Nov), while the delegates were busy registering themselves in the foyer of the ICT building, there erupted on the scene, almost without warning, a group of aboriginal dancers who gave a spectacular performance right there amidst us all! We enjoyed the unexpected bonanza over delectable red and white wines, and exotic canapés.

The official conference opening day (24 Nov) began with an introduction to the whole event by Dr. Ken Winkel, followed by the opening plenary address by Prof. David Warrell, who held us spellbound by his wealth of knowledge on the subject rendered in impeccable Queen's English. We then had a wide variety of views on the problem of snakebite from around the globe, in the subsequent sessions by experts from Asia, Africa, Europe, North & South America, and of course, Australia. A very pertinent perspective from the point of view of the World Health Organization was given by Dr. Ana Padilla-Marroquin, the Programme Manager for Blood Products and related Biologicals of the WHO, Geneva, who had earlier (in May 2008) organized a Workshop on Regulation of Antivenoms at Jakarta, Indonesia, that I was fortunate to have attended.

Tea time at The Melbourne Zoo Conference Centre. [Please click picture to enlarge]



The penultimate day of the conference (27 November) was a special day, since the scientific sessions were organized within the Melbourne Zoological Gardens in a beautiful conference hall, and a tour was organized in the afternoon to the reptile park, where we gawked at some of the most venomous snakes and lizards in the world, including the dreaded Taipan, and the aptly named Gila (pronounced Heela) monster. The evening was rounded off by a fabulous banquet at the Melbourne Aquarium, which I regretfully missed because of the horrific happenings back home in India (the Mumbai carnage) that caused me to lose my appetite.

A sad end for me, for what was a most memorable conference. But I take solace in the fact that the next edition of the GICT (Global Issues in Clinical Toxinology) will be held right here in Cochin at the institute where I work, in 2010. The Indian Society of Toxicology will leave no stone unturned in making this event (TOXOCON-6) as grand a success as its predecessor.
Contact Dr. Pillay by clicking here

*(**Editor's Note:** Professor Pillay is perhaps the most widely known toxicologist in the world from the Asian continent. Rarely a month passes, when he is not invited by one or the other august society around the world to chair a scientific session, hold a CME, render scientific and technical advice, or deliver lectures on specialized topics. Only a few months back, Professor Pillay visited Stockholm, and before that several countries of south east Asia. To read Professor Pillay's experience in Stockholm, readers may want to the linked page (bc001)*

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