Asia ARVO 2011: In-sight into Ophthalmology

ARVO, which stands for the Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) is the world’s largest organization with more than 12,500 eye and vision researchers. Considered the world’s premier eye research meeting, ARVO’s annual convention in Florida attracts over 12,000 researchers from around the world. The Asia-ARVO meeting is the ARVO meeting-equivalent in Asia, which typically attracts more than 1000 delegates from all over Asia and the world.

The idea of an Asian version of the ARVO meeting was first conceptualized by the Singapore Eye Research Institute (SERI), which has consequently organized two very successful SERI-ARVO meetings in 2003 and 2005. It has now evolved into the Asia-ARVO meeting to reflect ARVO’s commitment to form partnerships with Asian countries that have expanded eye research programs. As a result, the Asia-ARVO meeting is now on a biennial basis, and the host of the event is rotated amongst ARVO’s Asian counterparts, with the understanding that it will return in Singapore every fourth year.

SERI hosted the Asia-ARVO meeting from 20th to 22nd January 2011. This year’s meeting was all the more significant to SERI as its clinical partner, the Singapore National
Eye Centre (SNEC) has completed its 21st year. To commensurate this landmark moment and strengthen the very special and symbiotic relationship shared by SERI and SNEC, the SNEC 21st Anniversary International Meeting was staged concurrently with Asia-ARVO 2011. This joint meeting served as a symbolic reflection of the fundamental need for translational synergy between research and clinical medicine, which will pave the way for optimum and enhanced ophthalmic treatment and management strategies, with patients as the ultimate beneficiaries.

The main objective of this dual meeting was to bring internationally-renowned clinicians and researchers, as well as key opinion leaders, from all parts of Asia, the United States and Europe, to participate in the exchange of scientific knowledge pertaining to the advancement of ophthalmic research, and the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of eye diseases with particular relevance to Asia.

An unprecedented number of more than 1100 people (of which almost 80% were from the Asia Pacific region) attended this meeting held at the Resorts World Sentosa Convention Centre from 20th to 23rd January 2011.

The SERI Organizing Committee was exceptionally successful in bringing onboard more than 200 international experts and researchers, who managed to infuse the meeting with the true essence of high caliber oculair research. The opening ceremony was officiated by Mr. Lim Chuan Poh, Chairman, Agency for Science, Technology and Research. The main symposia platform comprised of over 233 presentations, offering discourses on the latest scientific discoveries in vision research covering clinical, epidemiological, translational and basic science approaches within specific sub-specialties, at the same time discussing new focus areas.

In addition to symposia that included major topics of cornea, retina, glaucoma, myopia, refractive surgery, stem cells, ocular genetics, ocular immunology, ocular imaging, neuro-ophthalmology and pediatric ophthalmology, the highlight of the scientific sessions was the much-touted and landmark ‘Bionic Eye’ symposium. This session was extremely thought-provoking and served as a platform to debate key hypotheses, answer major clinical questions and generated knowledge that might potentially lead to impactful breakthroughs in this area of research.

The SERI Organizing Committee had made a concerted effort to invite key opinion leaders in ophthalmology and vision research to deliver a series of intellectually stimulating plenary lectures highlighting important research advances in major ophthalmology sub-speciality fields.

ARVO’s emphasis on educational approach to research was once again integrated within the highly popular series of methodological workshops, focusing on the design and conduct of vision research, specifically for young researchers embarking on an academic path.

It included workshops on ‘Introduction to Genetic Epidemiology,’ ‘Basic Statistics for Non-Statisticians,’ ‘Writing Grants,’ ‘Scientific Papers & Reviews’ and ‘Health Services Research’ and all were well received by the meeting participants.

In the spirit of encouraging young doctors and scientists in research, the Organizing Committee awarded a total of 54 Travel Fellowship Awards, with funds generously donated by industry sponsors such as Heidelberg Engineering and Illumina as well as other research-based entities such as ORIA, CERA and ARVO. Concurrently, a total of 12 ‘Young Investigator Awards’ were bestowed upon exceptional young researchers for their outstanding clinical or basic ophthalmic research.

An important feature of this meeting was the strong presence and support by key Industry players. This was keenly demonstrated by the extensive sponsorship of this meeting i.e. the two Platinum sponsors (Allergan and Alcon), the two Silver sponsors (Novartis and Bausch & Lomb), the numerous Industry – sponsored symposiums including sessions by Carl Zeiss, and Menicon, as well as the fast uptake of all trade exhibition booths.

Another interesting aspect of the Asia-ARVO 2011 conference was the peripheral social activities arranged around the main meeting. The SERI Organizing Committee had strived not only to organize a scientifically stimulating meeting, but what was equally laudable was the effort that the organizers took to ensure that delegates have a great time after the scientific sessions were over. A series of social programmes were organized for all delegates and invited speakers. This included the SNEC-SERI open house, where delegates and guests were able to tour the SNEC/SERI facilities, whilst concurrently enjoying a fusion of culinary delights and a cultural-mosaic of entertainment.

The highlight of these events was the Asia ARVO 2011 Congress Dinner cum SNEC 21st Anniversary celebratory dinner, where delegates were able to wine and dine under the eco-friendly canopy of the Universal
Studios. Most delegates went away that night thrilled by the experience of a buffet of gourmet pleasures lining the streets of "Manhattan" and a night of movie-themed entertainment.

Asia-ARVO 2011 served as an embodiment of the Singapore Eye Research Institute’s success and increasingly prominent profile in ophthalmic research. Dissemination of key updates in ocular research and technology, networking session and collaborations fostered were at the heart of the event, and this will likely culminate in improvements in ophthalmology and vision research to aid the combat against eye diseases, a problem exacerbated by an aging population.

Host Institution: Singapore Eye Research Institute

The Singapore Eye Research Institute, SERI (www.seri.com.sg) is the national research institute for ophthalmology and vision research in Singapore. SERI is the focal point of eye research in Singapore, serving as the research arm of the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC) and other local eye departments including the National University of Singapore (NUS), and Tan Tock Seng Hospital. It also works closely with A*STAR, Duke-NUS, the Nanyang Technological University and other biomedical institutions and hospitals in Singapore, as well as throughout the world. Since its inception in 1997, SERI has strived to develop an international reputation as a leading eye research entity in Asia and the world, conducting broad-based basic, clinical, epidemiology and translational research programmes for various eye diseases, particularly diseases relevant to Asia

Supported By: The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO)

The Association for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology (ARVO) is the world’s largest organization for vision and ophthalmology researchers with more than 12,500 eye and vision researchers. Some 42% of members reside in over 70 countries outside the U.S. The membership is multidisciplinary and consists of both clinical and basic researchers (approximately 44% MD/Ophthalmologists, 26% PhD’s, and 30% Others, including optometrists, osteopaths, and veterinarians).

Participating Institutes:
- Alexandra Hospital, Department of Ophthalmology & Visual Science
- Changi General Hospital, Department of Ophthalmology
- National University of Singapore, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health
- National University of Singapore, Department of Ophthalmology
- Singapore National Eye Centre
- Singapore Polytechnic, School of Optometry
- Tan Tock Seng Hospital, Department of Ophthalmology
- NHG Eye Institute, National Healthcare Group
- Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences Department, Khoo Teck Puat Hospital
Overview of Asia-ARVO 2011 Survey:

- Approx. 60% of the delegates were not ARVO members, but almost 68% of these non-ARVO members are planning to join ARVO after attending the Asia-ARVO 2011 meeting.
- Approx. 67% of the delegates who responded to this survey have never attended the ARVO Annual meeting in the US, but of these numbers, approximately 83% intend to attend future ARVO US meetings, based on what was observed whilst attending Asia-ARVO 2011.

The meeting was of high scientific standard which bodes well for the future. The organization was – admittedly as expected – first class and the efforts by you and your admin team were exemplary.

Prof Michael Belkin, Sidney A Fox Professor of Ophthalmology, Tel Aviv University

Congratulations to you and all SERI workers who contributed so much to the overwhelming success of the Asia/ARVO meeting. Everything went off like clockwork, the presentations were well attended and greatly appreciated and the social programme excellent. I have heard nothing but praise for the organization, venue and other aspects of the meeting. There is little doubt that Singapore has once again set a high standard for the Asia/ARVO meeting that will be difficult for others to follow. The organizers and helpers must be pleased that their efforts paid off so well.

Prof Wallace Foulds, Emeritus Professor of Ophthalmology, University of Glasgow