

I was very honoured to be awarded the Travel fellowship by the British Hair and Nail Society (BHNS) to attend the 'First Barcelona Hair Meeting' in the beautiful beachside town of Sitges, Barcelona, from 29th September – 1st October 2022.

It was a very enlightening conference that attracted 500 delegates from 51 countries. It took place over three days, with elective pre-course lectures on the evening of the first day, followed by two days of highly informative talks.

On Day 1, I attended the elective pre-course lecture titled 'Practical approach: Diagnosis and Management of Cicatricial Alopecias' led by Drs Sergio Vano (Spain) and Rodrigo Pirmez (Brazil). They provided a very comprehensive overview of common cicatricial alopecias. My main takeaways were the trichoscopic clues for identifying cicatricial alopecias, which included loss of follicular openings or yellow dots, intense inflammatory signs such as redness and scaling, presence of mini tufts and pili torti. Another key trichoscopic finding was the presence of follicular red dots in Discoid Lupus Erythematosus, an excellent prognostic marker for hair regrowth. In the absence of trichoscopic signs, a positive pull test showing club-shaped anagen hairs reflects inflammation and may also signify cicatricial alopecia.

The conference organisers put together numerous enlightening lectures over the following two days, highlighting the latest research, updates and guidelines on common alopecias. There were concurrent lectures that ran parallel to each other, allowing the opportunity to explore different topics of interest. Some personal highlights from the rest of the conference included:

Firstly, the effectiveness of lower concentrations of intralesional corticosteroids when treating alopecia areata was highlighted by Dr Jerry Shapiro (USA) from a 2015 intrasubject study of his with four patients. This demonstrated no difference in hair density or calibre with 5 and 10mg/mL triamcinolone acetonide compared with the 2.5mg/mL dose. Furthermore, four incidences of reversible skin atrophy occurred with the 10mg/ml dose compared with one with the 2.5mg/ml dose. Although a small sample size, this could be an effective strategy in reducing steroid-related side effects where multiple patches are present or when injecting the beard area.

Secondly, it was fascinating to learn about the real-life experience of using oral jak-inhibitors in alopecia areata but also potential uses in Lichen Planopilaris from two case series, which reported improvements of 66% and 80%, respectively. Dr Lidia Rudnicka (Poland) expounded on the recently updated Alopecia Areata Scale, which upgrades the severity level by one for patients experiencing a negative psychosocial impact, loss of lashes/brows, inadequate response to treatment after six months or diffuse positive pull testing. Hopefully, this will widen patient access to these drugs in light of the recent approval of baricitinib for alopecia by the European Medicines Authority. Ultimately, it is an exciting time in Dermatology to see how the treatment of hair disorders with jak inhibitors develops over time.

Thirdly, Frontal Fibrosing Alopecia (FFA) variants. It was illuminating learning about occipital FFA, which may mimic the oophiasis pattern alopecia areata. Furthermore, in black women, FFA presents at a younger age and may present with perifollicular hyperpigmentation. Dr Andrew Messenger (UK) discussed the initial analysis of a collaborative study with Dr Dlova et al. of 100 South African patients, highlighting this lower average age of onset (36.5). Interestingly, this cohort had a high use of hair care products and leave-on skin products. 50% of these patients used sunscreens which may further support the sunscreen theory in FFA pathogenesis.

I thoroughly enjoyed the conference and am most grateful to the BHNS for supporting me in attending. I am sure my practice will improve as a result and will generate further research questions to explore. The next meeting in 2024 has been advertised, and I would strongly encourage trainees with an interest in hair and scalp disorders to attend.