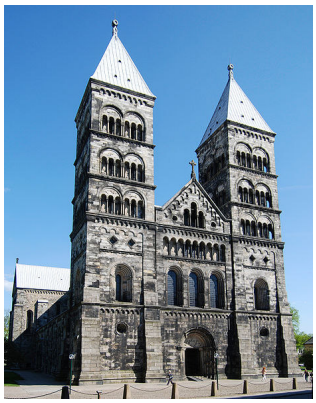
14th ANCA and Vasculitis Workshop 2009. Lund, Sweden and Copenhagen Denmark.

For four days the small Swedish university town of Lund hosted over 400 clinicians and scientists all interested in progressing research and clinical trials into ANCA associated vasculitis. The first International ANCA workshop was held in Copenhagen in January 1988. Since then well over 4500 research papers have been published in scientific and clinical journals concerning ANCA.



We now appreciate the importance of ANCA in diagnosis and treatment of disease, how to manage remission/relapse more effectively and we are making large strides in understanding the pathological nature of this group of diseases. However, we still have a lot more to learn. Although the key topics and talking points may have shifted since 1988, there still remains a fundamental need to understand this group of diseases more clearly and utilise this knowledge to design therapeutic agents to dampen down or stop disease.

Here is my short diary of what went on during the conference.

Saturday:

The workshop was opened by the chief organiser, Dr Marten Segelmark, who gave a brief history of the city and acknowledged the significant input of Scandinavian academic institutions into vasculitis research. The introduction was followed by a plenary lecture by Professor Charles Pusey from Imperial College, London, who gave a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in the field and where it is likely to head in the future. The evening was rounded off with a performance from a student choir from Malmo, singing traditional Swedish folk songs to an appreciative audience.

Sunday:

The following day started with a packed auditorium listening to a session devoted to the progress of several clinical trials taking place both in Europe and America, with leading clinicians heading a panel to discuss present and future therapy regimes for the treatment of ANCA vasculitis. Clinical trials were discussed which have focused on improving the safety and therapeutic effect of both combination therapies and new antibody based biological therapies. A ‘question time’ style panel then proceeded to debate the direction of present and future clinical trials with some interesting discussion dedicated to therapeutic agents currently being developed and assessed for the treatment of other autoimmune diseases, which may potentially play important roles in also treating ANCA associated systemic vasculitis. The highlight of the afternoon session was a mini-symposium dedicated to models of systemic vasculitis. Discussions centred on how best to recreate the fundamental features of vasculitic

disease in the lab, what we learn from current techniques and how they may be improved.

Monday:

The following day's presentations were devoted to cellular aspects of vasculitic disease. A number of excellent talks followed, specifically dealing with research projects dedicated to investigating how ANCA antibodies interact with different cells of the immune system. We now appreciate that ANCA associated vasculitis involves a number of different activated immune cells all promoting disease in different ways. What is not clear however is the effect that each type of cell type may have on one another. What we have started to look at in Birmingham, and what was touched on in a number of presentations, is whether different cells of the immune system 'talk' to each other to promote disease and if the answer is yes, can we disrupt this 'talk' to dampen down the inflammation associated with disease?

The day was drawn to a close with a lively debate by a distinguished panel of investigators concerning the origins of vasculitic diseases and the relative impact of ANCA on these diseases. The debate demonstrated the strides research has made in our understanding of ANCA associated vasculitis, whilst also reiterating that there is much more to do in order to address some fundamental questions that remain in ANCA research today.

Tuesday:

This was the last day of the conference and a relatively short one in terms of presentations. Following a continuation of the science theme from the previous day we learnt of other possible mechanisms of disease, which may add to those we know exist and may, with more research, provide new therapeutic targets. For the final afternoon of the ANCA workshop, delegates boarded buses to be driven across the civil engineering feat that is the Oresund Bridge (linking Sweden to Denmark) to Copenhagen where three parallel sessions were held. Each dealt with a different aspect of using ANCA as a diagnostic tool for disease. Highlights of these sessions included proposals to improve established techniques and the use of new technologies to detect ANCA consistently with high sensitivity. With that the majority of the delegates left the Danish capital to head for the airport, drawing this thought provoking meeting to a close.

For both me and colleagues at the university, the meeting was an excellent opportunity to converse with fellow researchers about our own and other's work. It

provided me with a new understanding of alternative lab techniques and how other groups around the world are tackling the same challenges that we see in the lab everyday in Birmingham. It was a chance to see and meet leading researchers in the field and to be part of a strong community of clinicians and scientists currently working in vasculitis research. Thank you for all your continued support towards research at the university. I am sorry I missed the AGM but hope to see you all soon to share with you some important findings from the research done here in Birmingham.

Best Wishes,

Neil