



# International Development Fund reports

The International Development Fund provides small grants to members to help microbiologists in developing countries and Eastern Europe. Closing date for 2007: 21 September. See the SGM website for details.

## *Chlamydia trachomatis* and reproduction in Iran

Over the last few years *Chlamydia trachomatis* has emerged as the most common bacterial cause of sexually transmitted disease in the UK. Indeed rates of infection have increased dramatically during this time. It is therefore not surprising that a National *Chlamydia* Screening Programme is now in place in an attempt to reduce the number of infections and so help prevent important sequelae such as ectopic pregnancy and infertility.

Following an academic visit to the Avesina Research Institute (ARI), Tehran, in 2004, I was invited to take part in a WHO-funded study investigating the prevalence of *C. trachomatis* in females attending obstetrics and gynaecology clinics in Tehran. Surprisingly, we discovered a high prevalence which inspired us to collaborate on a similar study in men. These findings of our collaborative studies led me to propose running a *Chlamydia* workshop in Tehran to raise the profile and awareness of *Chlamydia* in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

It was therefore appropriate that the ARI, headed by Dr Akhondi and which is the most comprehensive clinic for treatment of infertility in Iran, hosted the workshop in May 2006. Eighteen scientists and physicians who were mostly based in Tehran and members of staff from the ARI attended the five-day event which was opened by Dr Zali, the Chancellor of Shahid Beheshti University, where the ARI is located.

We were pleased that this Workshop was included in the CME (Continuous Medical Education) credit programme offered by the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education. All the participants and lecturers gained the relevant certification.

The aims of the Workshop were to provide a comprehensive lecture programme on the clinical importance of *C. trachomatis* and to provide an in-depth series of practicals and demonstrations on the diagnosis of *C. trachomatis* in a clinical laboratory.

I was fortunate in having excellent help from the ARI, especially Dr Chamani and Dr Aarabi, in co-ordinating the lecture programme and practicals, respectively. From the discussions following each lecture, there was no doubt that there was great interest from the participants, and in the last lecture which looked at the feasibility of a *Chlamydia* Screening Programme in Iran, this initiated great excitement, although we realized that much needed to be done before this could realistically be considered.

Despite having devised a demanding practical programme, it was reassuring to see that all the diagnostic tests worked and that *C. trachomatis* was cultured at the ARI for the first time – a notable success for which my technical colleague in Sheffield, Mr Geary deserves much of the credit.

One of the outcomes of the Workshop was the desire to hold more such activities in Iran so that knowledge and expertise could be shared. It was even suggested that an annual *Chlamydia* update meeting be held to report on local activities. Of course, this was all very satisfying to me and I wish them every success with these endeavours in the future. However, none of this would have been possible without the support of the SGM and it clearly illustrates the importance of their International Development Fund. There is no doubt in my opinion that there is much to be gained from further studies on the importance of *C. trachomatis* in the Middle East as a whole.

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*I am grateful to Dr Kokab, my PhD student and native Farsi speaker, for his many efforts in helping to make this workshop a success.*



## Bioinformatics and post-genomics molecular biology training in Africa

The SGM Fund provided bursaries for young African microbiologists to attend an international course organized in Kampala, Uganda, by Professor Keith Gull and members of his lab from the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, University of Oxford.

Keith and three Research Fellows, Bill Wickstead, Eva Gluenz and Catarina Gadelha taught a course on *Bioinformatics and post-genomic molecular cell biology of African trypanosomes and malaria*. The course involved lecturers from the USA and Belgium in addition to local Ugandan and Kenyan scientists. It included a mixture of lectures, seminars and computer exercises. 25 students from Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, Mali, Nigeria, Camerons Malawi and Ethiopia attended the course which was heavily over-subscribed with over 250 applications for places. The course was very timely since the *Trypanosoma brucei*, *Leishmania major* and *T. cruzi* genome sequences have been published over the last few years. Genome information about these and other parasitic protozoa is having an important impact on drug and vaccine research, in addition to our knowledge of the basic biology of these parasites.

There is great interest in Africa in modern parasitology research and teaching. This course provided an insight into both techniques and applications of bioinformatics, but placed that information in the context of how it enables discovery biology in these neglected diseases.

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◀ Opposite page. Adrian Eley addresses participants in the *Chlamydia* workshop held at the Avesina Research Institute in Tehran in May 2006. *Adrian Eley*

◀ This page. African microbiologists on the malaria bioinformatics course held in Kampala, Uganda, being tutored by Dr Eva Gluenz. *Keith Gull*