CytoPage

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Newsletter of the Society of Cytology, Singapore

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1. From the President’s Desk

Welcome to the first newsletter of our brand new cytology society in Singapore. We are really proud to announce this society which was incorporated in 2014. It is a society which has spent many years in discussion and conception.

With the encouragement of the International Academy of Cytology (IAC), the Society of Cytology, Singapore was officially formed during the IAC Tutorial in October 2014 and is now an affiliated society with the IAC. It is a formally registered in Singapore and is a society for cytology technologists and cytopathologists where we hope to promote our profession through education and research.

In this first newsletter, we report on the 2014 IAC Tutorial and we would also like to introduce you to activities that we have planned. We hope to conduct several workshops and seminars throughout the year.

In August, we have invited Dr John Smith from the United Kingdom to speak on gynaecologic cytology, and for non-gynaecologic cytology we have Dr Syed Ali from USA. We will also hold smaller workshops and tutorials with local speakers, the first such seminar will be a breakfast meeting on 24th April, 2015 hosted by Singapore General Hospital (SGH) Cytology with the theme of “Unexpected Neck Happenings on FNA”. This will be at the Library, level 7 at Academia, SGH, at 8.00am and all are welcome to attend.

The founding council of the Society is as follows:

Office Bearers and Committee 1st Council:

President: Angela Chong Phek Yoon
Hon Treasurer: Anjula Thomas
Hon Secretary: Sangeeta Mantoo
Vice President: Issam Al Jajeh
Council Members: Nga Min En (Editor), Song Lee Hong
Co-opted members: Jacqueline Hwang (ex-officio), Rafay Azhar, Emily Goh (ex-officio), Wu Zhichuan, Aisha Dhewar (NUH), Tan Puay Hoon

We as the first council are here to serve all members and would appreciate any feedback from members or interested members.

Angela
2. Note from Editor

Welcome to the very first edition of CytoPage! This is the triannual newsletter of the Society of Cytology, Singapore. In it, we will highlight news updates related to Cytopathology to the community of practicing pathologists and cytotechnologists in Singapore and the region. In each issue, we will also publish bite-sized educational articles focussing on clinically relevant issues in the practice of cytopathology. An additional feature is Viewpoint, a short article written by one of our very own practitioners in the field of Cytopathology.

In this inaugural edition, we are honoured to include a Letter of Encouragement from Professor Philippe Vielh, President of the International Academy of Cytology. Professor Philippe has also found time to contribute to our very first Educational Page, which is a timely and succinct discussion on the significance of oncocytic cells in salivary gland aspirates. All are encouraged to answer the question in CytoQuiz, which is based on Professor Vielh’s write-up. The answer will be revealed in the next edition of CytoPage.

In Viewpoint, Mr Wu Zhichuan humorously shares his candid take on what it takes to be a cytotechnologist.

Finally, this issue of CytoPage also includes some snapshots from the successful IAC Tutorial held in the Singapore General Hospital in November 2014.

We hope that you will find this an enjoyable read, and look forward to your contributions to many more issues in future!

Min En
3. Letter of Encouragement

It is a great pleasure and an honor to celebrate the first newsletter of the Society of Cytology, Singapore (SCS).

This newsletter will indeed be a major link and a critical medium between the members of your young Society.

The dynamism of a Society being obviously linked to all members and the leading team, I have no doubt about the full success of your venture aimed at establishing a network of people interested in cytology and at spreading knowledge not only in Singapore but also in your neighboring countries.

As current President of the International Academy of Cytology (IAC: http://www.cytology-iac.org), let me also welcome, as an affiliated society, the SCS, to our worldwide non-profit organization consisting of cytopathologists, cytotecnologists and other professionals concerned with practice of clinical cytology and research.

The recent organization of a very successful IAC Tutorial of Cytology at the Singapore General Hospital is the first step of very long and fruitful collaboration between both organizations.

Congratulations on your first newsletter and greetings to the Society of Cytology, Singapore!

Philippe Vielh MD, PhD
President, IAC
January 2015
4. Educational page

Significance of oncocytes in FNA of salivary glands

Salivary glands may exhibit a large range of benign and neoplastic lesions with oncocytic features or its mimics

First used in 1932 by Jaffe in the salivary gland [1], the term ‘oncocytes’ or ‘oncocytic cells’ is defined as a kind of cell characterized by one or two big nuclei with distinct nucleoli and abundant, dense and well-limited cytoplasm due to the accumulation of numerous mitochondria.

The presence of oncocytes:
- may be secondary to a benign metaplastic process (focal or diffuse oncocytosis)
- may characterize a primary tumor (oncocytic tumors) or
- can be seen in salivary gland neoplasms (pleomorphic adenoma or Warthin tumor)

Cytomorphologic distinction on FNA samples may be very challenging or quite impossible between the following entities [2, 3]: i) focal or diffuse oncocytosis and oncocytic tumors; ii) benign and malignant oncocytic tumors, and; iii) oncocytic carcinoma and oncocytic variant of mucoepidermoid carcinoma. Differential diagnosis between a Warthin tumor and pleomorphic adenoma is possible when a cystic component with lymphocytes and metachromatic fibrillar matrix material are present respectively. A recurring difficulty is the distinction between oncocytomas and low-grade acinic cell carcinoma: oncocytomas have densely granular to waxy-appearing cytoplasm (PTAH positive) without vacuoles, whereas tumor cells in acinic cell carcinoma have delicate cytoplasm with small vacuoles (intracytoplasmic zymogen granules - PAS+, diastase-resistant). The presence of finely vacuolated cytoplasm in acinic cell carcinomas should always prompt the morphologist to exclude the possibility of a metastatic renal cell carcinoma (CD10 and EMA positive and CK7 negative).

References

Philippe Vielh MD, PhD
President, IAC
January 2015
5. CytoQuiz

The pictures show FNA material from 2 different parotid nodules. Which 2 pictures represent oncocytic cells?

A) A and C  
B) B and C  
C) A and D  
D) B and C

The answer to CytoQuiz will be published in the next issue of CytoPage.

Readers who are registered with the Singapore Medical Council can be accredited for 1 CME point upon completion of CytoQuiz. Please refer to the accompanying e-mail for more information.
As a cytotechnologist, my most routine task is primary screening of cervical pap smears. As fellow cytotechnologists would concur with me, it is a hard row to hoe. And nobody could have made a better analogy on the difficulty of screening a pap smear as compared to Schenck and Reuter. They state that "The problem of searching for a suspicious cell can be illustrated by the following analogy: detect large cars among smaller cars while flying 1,000m high in an area 230km in length and 720m broad within five minutes at a velocity of twice the speed of sound." [1] In summary, screening pap smears can be a daunting task - a task which I stumbled upon 4 years ago.

I had just graduated from the National University of Singapore with a major in Cellular and Molecular biology, and I was frantically looking for a job. I came across "cytology", a term which felt alien to me. Yet I felt the calling to apply for it! The feeling was surreal when I was first called up for an interview. And added on the fact that I had no idea what cytology was. What does a cytotechnologist do? I had to rely on the ever-so-eager googling skill of mine which turned up result that would read “Cytology is that branch of life science, which deals with the study of cells in terms of structure, function and chemistry.”

“All right!” I am ready for my interview.

Suffice to say my interview went reasonably smoothly and I got the job. From then on it was another four years of hard work, working towards getting accreditation from the International Academy of Cytology. I started my cytotechnologist career at a private institution, where the workload predominantly consisted of Pap smears. I started learning non-gynaecological preparation, alternating with screening of Pap smears. Even though there were senior cytotechnologists I could consult, the sheer amount of theory to grasp felt like I was back in school.

After almost three years in the private institution, I moved on to Singapore General Hospital where I could gain further exposure to non-gynaecological cases. I got my accreditation in my fourth year as a cytotechnologist. I came to appreciate cytology as both an art and science that goes beyond a simple job.

But let’s face it! Even after all that, cytology is about lifelong learning. Every day is a challenge, every Pap smear is different. Let us also not forget that at the heart of all we do, we do it for the patient!

7. IAC Tutorial

The IAC Tutorial was held at the Academia, Singapore General Hospital over the weekend of 23 – 25 November 2014. We had 5 speakers from the IAC – Dr Syed Ali, Dr Andrew Field, Dr Fernando Schmitt, Dr Dina Mody and Dr Phillipe Vielh. The course had 146 registrants from over 26 countries.

Group Photograph

Dr Sangeeta Mantoo and Dr Phillipe Vielh
Dr Syed Ali

Dr Daniel T and Dr Angela Chong – caught munching