Horizons in Medicine 25: Advancing on all levels

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Every year, the volume and pace of medical research increases and the practising physician can struggle to keep updated on the most important advances, even within his or her own specialty. Now entering its sixth decade, the RCP’s Advanced Medicine Conference hosts speakers from centres of excellence across academia and the NHS, offering a unique opportunity for consultants, trainees and GPs to be inspired and informed by expert talks that provide a bridge between the cutting edge research and practical applications in the clinic.

The papers gathered in here in this special supplement to Clinical Medicine offer just a snapshot of 4 days of talks, but give a flavour of the range of topics covered, with specialties including cardiovascular medicine, hepatology, gastroenterology, respiratory medicine, rheumatology, haematology, neurology, pharmacology, genetics and elderly care. The advances that ultimately translate into changes in clinical practice can occur on many levels – basic science, technological development, or simply a paradigm shift in how a disease is regarded – and the papers included here span this continuum.

At one end of the spectrum, Dr Wing-Kin Syn outlines how technological advances can have an equal impact on clinical practice. Cardiovascular magnetic resonance has revolutionised the treatment of conditions ranging from thalassemia to cardiomyopathies; Dr Laura-Ann McGill and Professor Dudley Pennell review the new landscape of anticoagulation.

Also in the area of cardiovascular medicine, the new oral anticoagulants, with their reliable dose response and reduced need for monitoring in comparison to warfarin, the previous mainstay of treatment, have revolutionised the management of conditions ranging from venous thromboembolism to atrial fibrillation while introducing new clinical limitations and challenges. Professor Mike Laffan and Dr Susie Shapiro review the new landscape of anticoagulation.

Other papers included here illustrate that advances in clinical medicine can be the result of a paradigm shift in recognition. It has only recently been recognised that eosinophilic oesophagitis is a common disorder, with an incidence in the UK population comparable to inflammatory bowel disease; Professor Stephen Atwood explains how frequent misdiagnosis as gastro-oesophageal...
reflux disease has prevented patients from receiving optimal treatment, and summarises the latest developments in diagnosis and treatment. Similarly, Professor Rodney Graham provides a perspective on the recent shift in thinking that has seen joint hypermobility syndrome reclassified as a multi-systemic genetic illness, rather than a relatively trivial disorder in otherwise healthy subjects, and reviews the implications for clinical management.

Finally, changes in society are drivers for changes in clinical practice, with the aging population being one of the most important. Older patients are at increased risk of malnutrition and adequately addressing nutritional in older acute patients presents numerous challenges; Dr Martin Vernon and colleagues present an overview of the clinical evidence for the decisions on assisted nutrition that clinicians are being faced with increasingly often.

The aging population is also behind an increasing but under-recognised clinical challenge – substance misuse in the elderly. As Professor Ilana Crome explains, better recognition of this problem has also brought a growing body of evidence that addiction can be successfully treated in this group, although specific treatment data and screening tools are urgently required.

A collection of papers can only give a flavour of an event such as this, with its opportunities for dialogue, debate and discussion, and as conference organiser I would like to reiterate my thanks to all the speakers. The 2014 Advanced Medicine Conference promises to offer another fascinating overview of biomedical advances from the laboratory bench to the clinic and I should finish by advising all readers who are able to attend to do so.