

Meet a New ASP Member

In our autumn issue of the Newsletter, we meet new ASP Member Dr. Rupika Delgoda, Executive Director of the Natural Products Institute at the University of West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica. Dr. Delgoda shares her enthusiasm about the recent ASP Annual Meeting, as well as for organizing TEDxJamaica. We warmly welcome Dr. Delgoda to the ASP and look forward to seeing her at future Annual Meetings.

By Dr. Dan Kulakowski

How did you hear about the ASP?

A fellow attendee at a European natural products conference recommended the ASP, and I followed up doing web searches.

Why did you join ASP?

This summer's ASP Annual Meeting held in Oxford, Mississippi, this summer was one of the best natural product conferences I have been to. It had a wonderful blend of excellent international scientists, passionate interest groups, and impactful presentations. I have found several colleagues with whom I share overlapping research interests, and it has been truly rewarding to learn and discuss the potential for collaboration. In hindsight, I should have joined the ASP a long time ago.

Do you belong to any other scientific societies?

Yes, I am a member of the International Society for the Study of Xenobiotics (ISSX), the International Society for the Development of Natural Products (ISDNP), and I attend meetings of Microsomes and Drug Oxidation (MDO) and CYP450 conferences, whenever possible.

What are your current research interests in pharmacognosy?

I am passionate about several projects, one of them being the investigation of potential herb-drug interactions. Island wide surveys indicate that 80% of prescription users also co-medicate with herbs, which highlights the need for awareness of safety in Jamaica. As such, we undertake in vitro investigation of cytochrome P450 enzyme inhibition by commonly used herbal medicines, and we plan to embark on clinical evaluations of those that demonstrate potency at the in vitro level.

Another current project involves the establishment of bioactivity assays in the hope of searching for and validating novel uses of ethnomedicines and endemic resources, particularly given the region's rich biodiversity both in terrestrial and marine resources. Developing nations such as Jamaica have, as their largest bottleneck, the ability to conduct biological assays. We now have projects on cell culture based anti-proliferative assays, chemopreventive assays, and the identification of mechanisms for insecticide



Dr. Rupika Delgoda

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resistance by disease-carrying mosquitoes, to name a few.

What is your scientific background?

My first degree was in Chemistry (BS, First Class Honours), from the University of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. I then completed a PhD in Pharmacology at the University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, where my research focused on structural studies of arylamine N-acetyltransferase (NAT), under the supervision of Dr. Edith Sim. My interest in drug metabolism was further cemented when I undertook a postdoctoral fellowship under the tutelage of Dr. Gordon Roberts, at the University of Leicester, Leicester, United Kingdom, where I undertook NMR-based CYP450-ligand interaction studies. I have since taken an interest in searching for natural ligand interactions with CYP450 enzymes and their biological implications.

What would you like to achieve through your membership?

I would like to nurture and develop an international network of peers in the field of natural products that allows for the exchange of ideas and provides opportunities for collaboration. In addition, I would like to be aware of current trends in natural product development throughout the world. I would also like to use it as a platform for developing an awareness and interest in pharmacognosy in the Caribbean by introducing it to colleagues, graduate students and interest groups in the region.

What do you like doing in your spare time?

I am a mother of two young children and the concept of "spare time" is alien. I enjoy spending time with them, engaged in their academic work, music, dancing, sports, and traveling. I also enjoy organizing TEDxJamaica events, photography, and meditating.

What are you currently reading?

I am currently reading *Molecular and Cellular Toxicology* by Dr. Lesley Stanley. ■

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