Storm Ciara provided a dramatic backdrop to the 7th Joint Dutch / UK Clinical Genetics Societies and Cancer Genetics Groups Conference—this year held at the Wellcome Genome Campus, Cambridge. I was attending to present a poster on hereditary causes of hypertriglyceridaemia, work completed with biochemistry and genetics colleagues. As a Chemical Pathology trainee attending this congress for the first time, I was uncertain about what to expect; nevertheless, after overhearing one delegate’s Homeric tale of their journey, from Belgium to East Anglia, I was left in no doubt that this would be an interesting conference! Notwithstanding the Great British weather’s attempts to frustrate the delegates’ travel arrangements, the conference still had a truly international feel, with contributors arriving from as far afield as the USA.

The superb choice of conference venue provided energising spaces to network with colleagues. I was able to meet with several friendly Clinical Genetics trainees and, over coffee, they were kind enough to demystify what differentiates a ‘hot’ variant from being merely warm, and also to explain some of the biggest hottest topics in genetics, like the ‘100,000 Genomes Project’. In exchange, I was invited to share my own experiences of treating hereditary metabolic diseases and I had a few stimulating discussions about characteristic biochemical patterns of disease and the utility of formal genetic confirmation and cascade testing. As a specialty that relies heavily on shared expertise, research collaboration in the post-Brexit era was also a topic high on the agenda for discussion.

After some weather-related rejigging of the plenary programme, the talks got underway. These were perfectly pitched to absorb an understanding of the contemporary issues facing clinical genetics. I was particularly looking forward to hearing Dr Marijke Wevers from Radboud University Medical Centre, Nijmegen, and she certainly did not disappoint—having previously trained and practiced in The Netherlands, she presented some unique personal perspectives following her time working as a Clinical Geneticist in UK. However, for me, the oracular pearl was delivered during the free papers session by Dr John McDermott from the Manchester Centre for Genomic Medicine. His abstract, about developing a novel pharmacogenetic point-of-care test, offered a fascinating glimpse of the future. He addressed
some of the vexed questions that are also common to my own specialty’s point-of-care tests (such as clinical utility, quality assurance and user training) and he offered perspectives from a uniquely genetics standpoint.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my time at conference. I was delighted to mix with such an engaging and extremely welcoming group of clinicians and scientists. I feel that attending a different specialty’s conference provides opportunities far beyond learning new skills and meeting new people—it can actually help offer up fresh perspectives about your own specialty. For me, the two days highlighted the challenges that all clinicians face, particularly where the challenges relate to clinical diagnostics. I would encourage all trainees to attend at least one conference not directly related to their own specialty. You never know who you might meet or what you might learn!

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