

Report on ISCB Conference 2011

I was awarded the great opportunity of attending the ISCB conference from 21-25th August 2011. The conference was held in the Canada's capital, Ottawa.

The conference was well organized and the venue was in close proximity to our accommodation. The scientific themes of the conference were:

Models in Epidemiology

Models in Survival Data

Biomarkers

Causal Models

Meta Analysis

Clinical Trials

Adverse Events

Statistical Methods

Non-Randomised Studies

There were only two attendees from Africa and they were Esme and I. A large proportion of attendees were Europeans, closely followed by North Americans.

To my amazement there were Survival Analysis dedicated talks in every session in room 201. Since my interest is primarily in Survival Analysis I had to fight the urge to simply stay planted in room 201 all day. The survival covered talks on Relative survival, competing risks models, multistate models, recurrent events, time dependent covariates and missing covariate values. Due to my strong background knowledge of these models and the underlying theory I found the information presented in these talks far easier to grasp. There was an entire session with four talks dedicated to the topic of multistate models. This was the session in which I presented. Working two years on a talking which very had interest or expertise in led to me feeling a little isolated. But the great thing about the conference was that I got to meet three other people working in this area. One of these talks was very theoretical and examined the new-methods available for testing the Markov assumption. This was interesting but the methods described can only be applied to progression only models (ie. With no reverse transitions). My talk was received extremely well and there were a few questions and comments. It was suggested that I look at the rate of CD4 count increase in individuals on ARV Therapy and that they have such data and would like to collaborate. A great comment was that it was one of the best talks due to the practical way in which it was presented. I felt that talks that were too theoretical were not received as well as they only appeal to those who have a firm body of knowledge in that particular area of research. Professor Berndix Carstensen from the Steno Diabetes Centre in Denmark shared his newly developed R program for multistate modelling with me and encouraged me to review the program and its strengths and weaknesses.

Topics other than Survival Analysis which interested me were that of Meta Analysis, the design and analysis of Clinical trials and issues surrounding the handling of missing data. This conference, due to the smaller size, provided a great platform to network and share ideas. I exchanged business cards with many Statisticians and have received five emails to date requesting for my slides to be sent. Professor Lehana Thabane from McMaster University in Canada, offered me a fully funded PhD under his supervision. He is involved in developing Biostatistics capacity in Sub Saharan Africa and

works closely with Prof. Henry Mwambi. The programme includes two years of coursework and is focused on the more practical aspects of consulting. I was quite flattered by his offer but am not particularly interested right now as I would like to continue my research in Multistate models under the supervision of Prof Geert Mollenberghs and Prof Henry Mwambi.

I thoroughly enjoyed this conference and returned feeling motivated and refreshed.