

International Travel Report: ISI World Congress Conference: 19-27 August 2011

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Introduction

On August 19, 2011 I travelled to attend and present a paper that was accepted for oral presentation at the Scientific Programme of the 58th International Statistical Institute (ISI) World Statistics Congress in Ireland, Dublin. The paper was accepted in a Contributed Paper Sessions (CPS). CPS are submitted by individuals and grouped into meetings by the Local Programme Committee. The title of the paper presented at the CPS was "Small Area Estimation of HIV using National Survey data". The technical report in co-authorship with Prof. S Manda who is also supervising me throughout this research project was submitted to the conference proceedings of the ISI conference.

The trip was sponsored by Biostatistics Unit of the South African Medical Research Council (MRC), in an attempt to capacitate and expose young statistician like me to the international conferences.

Purpose of the trip

Attend and present my research project at the Scientific Programme of the 58th International Statistical Institute (ISI) World Congress in Ireland, Dublin.

The Conference

The ISI has held biennial Congresses since year 1853 and recent sessions have attracted over 2,500 delegates. Participants include academics, government and private sector statisticians and related experts from various institutes.

The biennial meeting of the ISI is probably unique in bringing together statisticians from across the disciplinary spectrum. It brings together statisticians from both developing and developed nations to share experiences, expertise and challenges.

Registration for the Congress took place on August 21, 2011; the scientific programme commenced on Monday the 22nd and concludes on Friday the 26th August 2011. Hong Kong will be hosting the next ISI meeting in August 2013.

Sessions

The sessions were divided into four, i.e., Invited Paper Sessions, Special Topic Sessions, Contributed Paper Sessions and Poster. The Scientific Programme of the 58th Congress offered innovative and stimulating topics with well-balanced presentations. The most outstanding and interesting session to me was chaired by Professor Evdokia Xekalaki (Athens University) and Sir David Cox ; Donald B.

Rubin and Peter J. Huber were the presenters in the session titled “Reflections on the Past, Present and Future of Statistics”. Sir David Cox talked about “Current Challenges in the Theory of Statistics”. He talked about the history of statistics and his contribution in the development of likelihood theory where he worked with the legendary statisticians like Ronald Fisher. He encourages the statisticians to focus and understand the theory of statistics. He also outlines and compared the statistics before and after the 20th century. The advantage of fast machine language learning was mentioned in his talk. He considers various issues such as technological development, the growing demand for statistical information from vast disciplines. “The statistics in two decades from now will need to look quite different to what it looks like today”, he concluded.

Other sessions that I found more interesting and educative were:

Estimation and inference; ISI: where are all young people? Young Statisticians; Environmental epidemiology; Spatial statistics and its applications; Teaching sampling techniques in agriculture, biology and social sciences, Careers for Youth; Complex analysis for longitudinal data; advanced techniques for modelling maternal and child health in Africa.

I presented the research paper under the session “Small Area Estimation” on the 24th August 2011. Only one comment was made. The audience congratulates the talk and wanted some further details on estimation of HIV prevalence in small areas where there is no data available. I addressed his question.

Future Benefits

After establishing new contacts during the conference with *Divine Ewane Ediebah, Research Fellow in Biostatistics, EORTC, Belgium*, we discuss issues that might result in a collaborative research in the near future. Some of the issues that we discussed were: generalized clinical trials under survival data from design to inference. Different designs applied based on the trials. We also thought of starting a collaborative project on joint modelling of different outcomes: longitudinal data, survival data, Quality of life in cancer patient, multivariate data, categorical data. On the following disease areas: HIV, TB, Malaria and Cancer.

Conclusion

ISI conferences are beneficiary for key contact, future research and keep up with research trend in the statistics field.

I would like to thank everyone at the MRC – Biostatistics Unit especially the Unit Director (Prof. Carl Lombard) and division manager (Prof. Piet Becker) for financial assistance. My supervisor Prof. Sam Manda for making sure that the work presented at the ISI conference is of quality, Emily Gomes for arranging all the administrative issues for me (i.e., visa, advance, transport, etc., Steve, Busi and Lieketseng for their encouraging word of advice and wisdom.

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