

Bar Harbour: a haven for learning genetics

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

'Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy in the world' - Gustave Flaubert

When I first heard about the 'Bar Harbour Course' on Medical Genetics, from my HOD, Dr Shubha Phadke, little did I realize the impact that this short course would have on my personal and professional life. For those of you who are not familiar with the Bar Harbour course, let me pen down a few details about the course.



Figure 1 Bar Harbour.

The idea of a Short Course in Mammalian and Medical Genetics was conceived by none other than the Father of Medical Genetics, Dr Victor McKusick, way back in 1959, long before Genetics got recognition as a special branch in Medicine. Thus the first course was started in the summer of 1960, in Bar Harbour, in Jackson Laboratory, in the state of Maine, USA. This course has been successfully conducted every year after that and more than five thousand participants interested in various aspects of Genetics from all over the world have attended it since then. I attended the 56th course in Bar Harbour, from July 19 to July 31 this year along with my colleague, Dr Amita.

Jackson Laboratory is one of the leading mice research facilities in the world and is an apt lo-

cation for this course. The course was so well organized and made interesting that we seldom realized that we had attended 70 lectures in 2 weeks until one of the faculties mentioned it on the last day. There was a palpable excitement in the environment with a lot of cultural and professional exchange between participants from all over the globe. The participants included laboratory technicians, research professionals and clinicians working in the field of Medical Genetics.

The lectures were given by eminent and distinguished speakers who were authorities in their respective fields. The topics for the lectures were chosen very aptly and ranged from basic genetics to the most recent advances in the field like proteomics, metabolomics and epigenomics. It was a pleasure to listen to Jeanne Lawrence talk on her work on using *XIST* gene to silence the extra chromosome 21 in Trisomy 21 cell lines. Another memorable lecture was by Dr Harry C Dietz on TGF Beta signaling and Marfan syndrome. The versatility displayed by Dr Dietz in illustrating his work of more than 20 years in very simple terms was laudable. There were lectures on mouse genomics and mouse bioinformatics highlighting the fact that mice is the platform for biomedical research in the 21st century. Workshops on use of OMIM, UCSC genome browser, mouse bioinformatics and exome data analysis by PhenoDB were a boon in getting a first-hand experience and boosted my confidence.

Opportunity to interact with the faculty was another remarkable feature of the course. Every day we could choose to lunch with the faculty of our choice. Such rare occasions paved way for a lot of scientific insight. The exhibition of mice models for various human diseases was unforgettable. The passion and delight that I could see in the eyes of the researchers who explained their work made an indelible impression on me. As a beginner in the field of Genetics, it made me see the meandering path that I have to travel with much dedication, probity and sincerity if I need to make a substantial contribution to science.

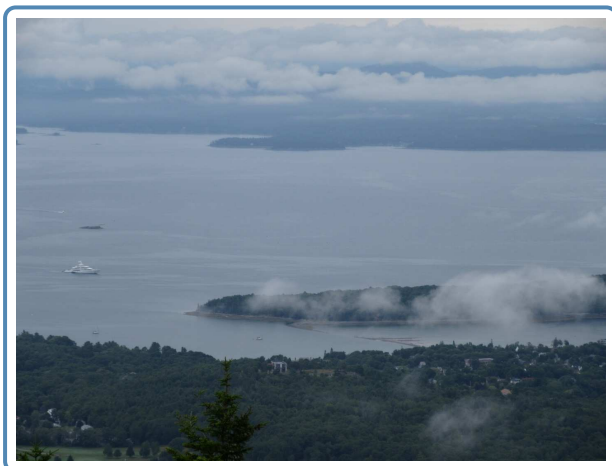


Figure 2 View from Cadillac mountain in Acadia National Park.

More than the topics I learnt, treasurable memories of interacting and acquainting with people

would remain etched in my mind forever. Whale watching in the Atlantic Ocean was a fabulous adventure. Maine is home to Acadia National Park, which is one of the oldest National Parks to the East of Mississippi River and has more than 40 different species of mammals and plant life. Learning genetics in such a picturesque environment has the special benefit that information is retained for a longer period of time because of the relaxed state of the brain in such a scenario. For anyone who is interested in Genetics, this course is worth attending as the cognizance and insight gained is phenomenal. On a personal note, this course has made me humble and realize the inconspicuous space I occupy in this world.

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GeNeEvent - The Indo-US Conference



The Indo-US Conference "Realizing the Potential of Rare Disorders in India" was held on 7th – 9th September 2015 at New Delhi. It was organized jointly by the Center of Medical Genetics, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi and the Office of Rare Diseases Research, NCATS, National Institute of Health, USA. The conference focused on the issues confronting people with rare disorders and how these can be addressed. Participants of the conference were able to interact with their counterparts in US and Europe where the system for diagnosis and management of rare disorders is well organized. The recommendations of the conference were to increase awareness of rare disorders among medical doctors, improve diagnosis through affordable next generation sequencing tests, strengthen social support groups through parents' associations, sensitize the relevant government department on the problems to get duty exemption for treatment for rare disorder, to create corpus funds by center and state governments and to allow easy import of metabolic foods for treating inborn errors of metabolism. Various government departments promised to support and help the cause of rare disorder.