

# HPBASA from inception to maturity

John Devar, *President*

Martin Smith, *Founding Member*

The seed to create a Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary (HPB) group in South Africa was planted at the 2005 European HPB Association (EHPBA) biennial congress in Heidelberg, Germany. Professor Philipp Bornman and Martin Smith had a pivotal conversation with the EHPBA committee regarding the integration of the South African HPB community into the broader regional and international HPB societal structures. Professor Bornman, a council member of the EHPBA at the time, and Professor Smith identified a significant opportunity for South Africa to contribute meaningfully to the field, noting that much of the scientific discourse at the congress was well within South Africa's capabilities. From this discussion emerged two primary objectives: the establishment of a national HPB chapter in South Africa and the submission of a bid to be adjudicated at the 2006 World Congress in Edinburgh to host the 2012 International HPB Association (IHPBA) World Congress in South Africa.

The realisation of these goals was made possible through generous financial backing from Boston Scientific and

Covidien, culminating in an exploratory meeting held in Magaliesburg in 2005. This two-day event, attended by HPB surgeons, gastroenterologists and interventional radiologists from around the country, encompassed both academic and business dimensions (Figure 1). The meeting resulted in blueprints for the inception of a national chapter and the World Congress bid.

In 2005, the successful hosting of the ISS (International Surgical Society) World Congress in Durban served as a springboard for collaboration with Professor Martin Smith leveraging the expertise of Turners Conferences, the congress organisers, to bolster the IHPBA bid. Despite an excellent bid presentation, Paris was chosen as the host city.

Undeterred by this setback, efforts persisted towards the establishment of the National Chapter. A steering committee was appointed, and the HPB Association of South Africa (HPBASA) was born. A constitution was drawn up based on those of the established HPB Associations and tailored to suit the South African context. This detailed the vision of



Figure 1. Inaugural Members at the Magaliesburg meeting  
Left to right: P Bornman, G Stapleton, H Schwalb, C Zaidy, D Clarke, C van Niekerk, M Smith  
F Anderson, J Ramos, S Thomson, C Apostolou, C Joseph, M Balabyeki, F Ikram  
Kneeling: Omshoro-Jones

the Association to recognise the need for multidisciplinary participation, which included HPB sub-specialists, gastroenterologists, radiologists, oncologists, transplant surgeons, anaesthetists, and pathologists. The aims were to advance knowledge, foster collaboration, and promote ethical standards in the treatment of hepatic, pancreatic, and biliary diseases. The objectives included promoting understanding of disease aetiology and treatment modalities, facilitating knowledge exchange among professionals, conducting collaborative research, nurturing camaraderie among clinicians and scientists, upholding ethical standards, promoting education and career development, and establishing a forum for data collation, analysis, and audit. The constitution also detailed how the office bearers would be elected and how the committee structure would function to promote the aims and objectives of the Association.

In 2006, the inaugural National Congress was convened in Johannesburg by Martin Smith, who was elected as the first President in 2006 and underpinned by robust support from Boston Scientific. This milestone event witnessed the formalisation of membership, election of council and office-bearers, and a full academic program with Professor Christos Dervenis as the first international guest. Subsequently, the decision was made to adopt a biennial congress model, complemented by smaller, focused meetings in the intervening years, a framework that endures to the present day.

In 2007, a bid was submitted for the 2011 regional EHPBA congress, culminating in the successful hosting of the event in Cape Town in collaboration with the Turners Conference.

The Congress garnered widespread acclaim, attracting renowned international figures from the HPB domain, and served as a catalyst for the rebranding of EHPBA to the European Africa HPB Association in acknowledgement of the achievements.

The nascent years of the society were not without challenges, particularly financially, yet remained characterised by notable accomplishments in academic pursuits and interdisciplinary integration. Key initiatives during this period included the formulation of consensus guidelines for chronic pancreatitis management, the establishment of a national chronic pancreatitis database, and the initiation of a travelling fellowship program. Jose Ramos took over as President in 2010 and was followed in the role by the following stalwarts who have led and promoted the Association during their tenure, Chris Ziady in 2012, Rob Bond in 2014, Jock Stapleton in 2016, Sean Burmeister in 2018, and Eduard Jonas in 2020. The biennial meetings were highly successful and the Association paired with the International Association of Pancreatology (IAP) to host their 2019 congress in Cape Town.

In 2022, a significant milestone was reached with the amendment of the constitution to encompass neighbouring countries within the society's purview, prompting a name change to the HPBA of Southern Africa. Presently, with a membership of 129, the organisation stands on a stable foundation, guided by an innovative and dedicated council and executive, and is poised to chart a trajectory of enduring impact in the years ahead.