Workshop: Standardisation of Semen Analysis: What Needs to be Done?

Presenter: Lars Björndahl, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, Sweden

Session Chair: Gordon Baker, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Sunday February 24th and Monday February 25th 2013

The workshop was presented twice and was well attended with a good mixture of clinicians, researchers and scientists involved in the diagnostic semen analysis. The session was lively with the highlight being the participation of many of the attendees in the discussion.

Dr Lars Björndahl gave a detailed yet concise presentation of the current state of semen analysis focussing on the facets that are contained in the recent edition of the WHO manual. In particular, emphasis was given to the more contentious issues, such as procedural changes in the recommendations and most importantly the evidence based approach that has been utilised for the determination of the new reference values.

Professor Baker then opened the topic for discussion whereby a number of issues/concerns were presented. In summary:

- the new “normal” range for morphology assessment. How realistic is it? How useful as an indicator? Does it define “normal” or “ideal”?
- performance of leukocyte quantitation. The real time constraints and value of counting 200 cells in samples with low numbers.
- value of the refined definition of azoospermia. In that although, scientifically correct, the suggested recording in such cases of <100,000 provides unfounded hope to patients and logistical difficulties for ART clinics
- the inclusion in the manual of new diagnostic procedures, in particular sperm nuclear DNA integrity.
- the differential between those that state they adhere to the WHO recommendations but the extent of actual adherence.
- Participation in external QA programs. Their value and ability to truly mirror the quality of assessment.

The discussion continued beyond the programmed duration of the workshop indicating the breadth of concerns. The overriding impression was doubts over the practicality of the new WHO guidelines and what is their true clinical worth.