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ISBER TRAVEL AWADDEE REPORT 2018
“THINKING BIG IN TEXAS”

I would like to begin by expressing my profound gratitude to ISBER for affording me the opportunity to attend this annual meeting. Attending the various symposia and workshops made me realise that biobanking is more than just storage of samples. There was something new to learn at every corner!

My work at the University of Zimbabwe encompasses a lot of teaching as well as pursuing my independent research interests. One of the goals I have been tasked with in my department is the establishment of a basic molecular biology lab and biobanking unit, which will provide services for students pursuing their undergraduate and postgraduate research projects. This idea came about after realising that most students undertaking studies which require basic molecular biology techniques end up outsourcing these services from private labs or other regional countries where they face challenges exporting samples to these places. In addition, there are numerous sample collections as a result of these studies and there is need for a repository.

Given this background, I had several goals to achieve by attending the annual meeting. Firstly, I needed to gather as much information as possible regarding setting up a biobank in an academic institution such as mine. The workshops on Designing and Maintaining a human tissue repository presented by William Grizzle and Kathy Sexton were quite informative in this regard. They touched on the different designs of repositories and various issues one should consider during the design and planning phase of establishing a biorepository. I particularly enjoyed the question and answer session which brought out the different needs that people had from different settings. This allowed me to see some of our limitations in my setting and how best to address them.

My second aim was to get an insight into the management, maintenance and upkeep of a biorepository. Several talks throughout the meeting addressed most of the issues related to this aim, in particular issues to do with sample integrity and sample traceability. I had an opportunity to visit several exhibitors who focus on informatics software required for managing a biorepository. It was good to be able to get a demo on sight and get a feel of the various software available. The exhibits were presented very well and quite informative. I was able to get some contacts whom I will be contacting to provide some assistance regarding our own biorepository.

Being around the community of biobank experts and leaders during this annual meeting was invaluable. It was a great learning and networking opportunity which will provide me with

the tools I need as I work with my colleagues to establish a biorepository in our department. I also plan to disseminate the knowledge gained at ISBER 2018 through talks at my institution e.g research symposia that are held regularly at the institution. I will also incorporate in my lectures some of the issues that were presented during the various workshops especially workshop 1 on returning individual genetic research results: challenges and responsibilities.

The ISBER 2018 Annual Meeting was a unique experience for me. I will forever treasure the warm welcome and friendship I experienced during my stay with the group. The 5k fun run was my favourite social activity (when fun and good health come together!). I will stay connected with ISBER and look forward to making a contribution in the future at a meeting similar to this one.

Congratulations to the organising committee for an excellent meeting and may you continue to support more ISBER Travel Awardees.