

A (Virtual) Welcome to Durban!

Dear Colleagues and Friends

I am pleased to welcome you to the 48th Annual Conference of the Anatomical Society of Southern Africa (ASSA). This congress was planned for 2020 and at that time, the members of the Local Organising Committee (LOC) from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Durban University of Technology were very excited to showcase the culture and history of the city and the surrounding attractions by way of hosting the conference in Durban.

As always this is an event to look forward to and we are always excited to see all the colleagues again, meet the students and learn about everyone's research projects. However, by March 2020, we were all becoming aware of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Worldwide, scientific meetings were either converted to virtual meetings or cancelled altogether. The hope of still having a physical conference forced the date to be postponed to 2021. To make up for this, a short-form ASSA World Anatomy Day virtual symposium was organised, while plans for a 2021 ASSA Conference went ahead.

As it stands, the ASSA Council and the LOC both feel that there has not yet been significant improvements in the status of the COVID-19 pandemic in Southern Africa, and that the risk to our members and the attendees are still too great to support a physical meeting. Notwithstanding this, the LOC saw a switch from a physical to virtual conference as an opportunity to be innovative and help blaze the trail for future virtual conferences. One clear advantage is that participation and attendance will not be limited to those that could make the trip down to the South Coast, but instead this is an opportunity to make the 48th Conference of ASSA a much more inclusive meeting for both national and international attendees. Another advantage would be the fact that the LOC was able to recoup many of the initial expenses of the conference, which in effect means that they are able to waive registration costs to all attendees!

With all of this said, I urge everyone to take this opportunity to participate in this historic meeting and invite your colleagues and students to consider joining as well. All will be welcomed and we look forward to an engaging, virtual meeting!

Sincerely,

Albert van Schoor
University of Pretoria