

## **Bone Joint Decade 2009 World Network Conference and Advocacy Seminar**

Washington DC played host for the 2009 BJD conference on October 20-24 2009. In conjunction with this conference of notional action networks was a two day meeting of international and U.S. patient advocates. This presented a wonderful opportunity to network, learn more about advocacy issues, and to contact respective embassies and congressmen to raise awareness for thousands of patients worldwide in need.

As a patient advocate I was extremely impressed by this elite group of professionals all brought together by a common goal- to focus on musculoskeletal health worldwide. The problems encountered by all countries at first sound different and wide ranging. However there was one common overriding factor common to all patient groups represented- the need for access to medical and allied health care practitioners and services.

We heard from many speakers over the course of the week. Many spoke on the burden of musculoskeletal disease with topics such as osteoarthritis, inflammatory conditions, back pain, and bone health. Some were complex medical issues such as treatment of clubfoot and joint replacement. Others spoke on osteoporosis and road crashes. The common thread linking all of these diverse conditions is the burden of disease whether preventable or not on the global community.

Strategies and goals for the next year were finalized and action plans made. This was an exciting and difficult exercise because the diverse needs in the global community were highlighted in these discussions. While access to cutting edge treatment in the US may mean surgeries, in Africa access to treatment may mean road access to a doctor 600 miles away. Strategic thinking in global terms needs to be broad based and sometimes very creative.

While we attended several very special luncheons and dinners, my favourite evening was spent at an impromptu dinner of arthritis advocates from across the globe. This was a passionate and highly motivated group of individuals with a common goal. A quick dinner turned into a three hour discussion on issues and needs of arthritis patients globally. We talked and brainstormed and planned projects to work on together over the next several months. At this table I found the true essence of networking and the passion of patient advocates.

Susan Borwick