

Microbial Diagnostics in Practice: The Good, the Bad and the Bugly

On Thursday 21 May, the British Society for Microbial Technology will host its 41st Annual Microbiology Conference at the RAF Museum in Hendon, North London. Here, the BSMT committee provided further biographical details of the six speakers contributing to the scientific programme.

This year's British Society for Microbial Technology (BSMT) conference will host a range of speakers from different fields of microbiology, including those in academia, research and clinical practice. As well as the scientific programme, the day will also feature a tradeshow featuring 21 leading microbiology companies supporting the event (a tradeshow preview is available elsewhere in this issue). All attendees are invited to visit each trade stand and come armed with questions for the commercial representatives.

The conference, which this year is dedicated to the memory of Jim Lindsay, a founder member of the BSMT who died in June last year, provides the opportunity for biomedical and clinical scientists, and microbiologists to discuss and debate their experiences. Registration is now open, and early booking is advised to secure a place. As always, the conference is an ideal opportunity for attendees to enhance their Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

Dr Sarah Pitt

Dr Sarah Pitt is the new IBMS President, a role to which she would seem particularly well suited given her long history of advocating for the profession and contributing to the development and training of biomedical scientists. After attaining her degree in microbiology from Bristol University, she trained as a biomedical scientist at the Royal Postgraduate Medical School in London. Her career has taken her to diagnostic

laboratories across the UK with time also spent working in Africa and Central Asia. Dr Pitt has had a longstanding interest in teaching and developing training in biomedical science. She lectures at all academic levels at the University of Brighton, with a particular expertise in clinical virology and parasitology.

Dr Pitt was the IBMS Chief Examiner for Virology until 2025 and during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was a regular voice

on BBC news and other media platforms, advocating for the role of laboratory diagnostics and explaining the intricacies of virology to a concerned general public. She has authored three textbooks, all focused on supporting learning and development within biomedical science.

At this year's Annual Microbiology Conference, Dr Pitt will speak on the current state of diagnostic microbiology in the UK. As IBMS President, her insights



The BSMT Annual Microbiology Conference offers an informative day bringing together leading experts, researchers, healthcare scientists and industry professionals.

on the future directions and challenges we may face at this crucial time for laboratory services will prove a thought-provoking start to the conference.

Dr Marie Anne Chattaway

Dr Marie Anne Chattaway, a seasoned clinical scientist, is Head of the *Salmonella* reference service at the Gastrointestinal Bacteria Reference Unit (GBRU) within the UK Health Security Agency, boasting an extensive tenure of over two decades. Beyond her main role, she actively engages in surveillance initiatives, providing vital microbiological information and expertise for outbreak investigations, and conducts in-depth analysis of genomic data, particularly focusing on antimicrobial resistance and population structures. Currently, she holds the position of co-lead and career academic lead for the Genomic and Enabling Data Health Protection Research Unit (GED HPRU).

Dr Chattaway's commitment to global health is evident through her decade-long involvement in fortifying laboratory capabilities for enteric bacterial diseases across Africa, achieved through the development and implementation of comprehensive training programmes, all in support of the International Health Regulation Programme's Global Health initiative. Additionally, she is currently undergoing training to become a consultant microbiologist via the HSST programme, further solidifying her expertise and impact in the field.

Dr Chattaway will be bringing her experience on enteric pathogens and will speak about a recent unusual case of cholera infection.

Dr Mike Beeton

Dr Mike Beeton is the lead scientist of the *Mycoplasma* and *Ureaplasma* Group at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He has 20 years' experience researching human mycoplasmas, with a recent focus on *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* and its role in human health and disease. His work has centred on understanding the prevalence of infection and the molecular mechanisms underpinning antimicrobial resistance.

From 2019 to 2023, Dr Beeton held leadership roles within the European



Delegates will enjoy a networking lunch while having the opportunity to engage with exhibitors in the tradeshow.

Society of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases (ESCMID) Study Group for *Mycoplasma* and *Chlamydia* Infections (ESGMAC), serving first as the Science Officer and subsequently as Chair (2021–2023). During this time, he co-founded the Early Career *Mycoplasma* and *Chlamydia* Researcher (ECMCR) Conference, designed to provide a supportive, low-pressure platform for early-career researchers to develop their presentation skills and showcase their work.

Recently, he co-led the first prospective global surveillance study of *M. pneumoniae* and is currently leading an international research project to improve molecular surveillance of *M. pneumoniae* across Europe and beyond.

Dr Jolyon Medlock

Dr Jolyon Medlock has worked on vector-borne diseases for more than 25 years and currently leads the UK's Medical Entomology Group. His first roles were in Africa studying malaria control and lymphatic filariasis as a field parasitologist with the Liverpool School

of Tropical Medicine but also worked for Oxfam in Mozambique as the malaria control programme officer following large-scale flooding. Since 2002 he has been working at Porton Down for the UK Health Security Agency.

Dr Medlock has a varied role which involves advising UK government on vector-borne disease risk and managing UK-wide vector surveillance systems. He also supports the UK Overseas Territories in their dengue prevention work and ECDC in European tick surveillance projects.

Dr Medlock's research interests focus on mosquito- and tick-borne diseases, including impacts of environmental and climatic change. He is particularly interested in the ecology of tick-borne diseases and environmental and ecological drivers for risk, and has published over 185 peer-reviewed articles on the subject.

Professor Michael Wren

Professor Mike Wren remains a well-known name in the area of anaerobic microbiology and was a practising biomedical scientist for 43 years until his retirement. Throughout a long and distinguished career, Professor Wren published numerous papers, contributed to chapters in many textbooks, and co-authored *Clinical Microbiology*. Working in collaboration with colleagues in industry, he also wrote *Introduction to Clinical Anaerobic Bacteriology*, a bench guide that has become a fundamental introduction and resource to many microbiologists.

In September 2004, Professor Wren

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was one of the first to be appointed to the role of Consultant Biomedical Scientist at University College London Hospital. He also held the role of visiting professor at the University of Westminster, where he was involved in teaching both on MSc and undergraduate courses.

In 2007, Professor Wren was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for Services to Biomedical Science. Since retirement, Mike has stayed active and his interest in medical history means he is currently the IBMS Honorary Librarian responsible for maintaining the Institute's collection of over 1500 titles.

Professor Martha Clokie

After studying biology at the University of Dundee, Professor Clokie undertook postgraduate studies in biodiversity in Edinburgh before moving to Leicester where she completed her PhD in Molecular Ecology. Early in her post-doc career, Professor Clokie worked with the University of Warwick and the Scripps Institute of Oceanography focusing on the study of the molecular evolution of plants, then cyanobacteria and bacteriophages.

Professor Clokie returned to Leicester in 2007 as a lecturer and was promoted to Professor in 2016. Since 2001 her work has focused on bacteriophages in environmental and clinical settings,

The scientific speakers



Dr Sarah Pitt

Principle Lecturer, University of Brighton. President, Institute for Biomedical Science



Dr Jolyon Medlock

Head of Medical Entomology, UK Health Security Agency



Dr Marie Anne Chattaway

Unit Head, Gastrointestinal Bacteria Reference Unit, UK Health Security Agency



Professor Michael Wren MBE FRSB

Retired consultant biomedical scientist



Dr Mike Beeton

Reader in Medical Microbiology, Cardiff Metropolitan University



Professor Martha Clokie

University of Leicester, Division of Microbiology and Infection; Director of the Becky Mayer Centre for Phage Research

particularly their distribution in nature and potential uses in healthcare and beyond. A key area of Professor Clokie's research is the investigation of bacteriophage therapy in relation to the treatment of *Clostridioides difficile* and other intestinal infections, and on urinary tract infections and respiratory infections. Through her role as the director of the UK's first centre for phage research she is also exploring other potential applications of this technology.

Given the rising prevalence of antimicrobial resistance, bacteriophage therapy may well finally break into mainstream clinical practice in the near future due in part to Professor Clokie's pioneering work.



For more information on the programme, registration details, and participation, please visit the BSMT website.

www.bsmt.org.uk