

Miss Sujata De: Chair of the ESPO 2023 Local Programme Committee

Su De is one of the UK's most prominent paediatric ORL surgeons, and has a leading role in planning ESPO 2023. Hannah Emerson caught up with Su recently to explore some of her thoughts and her plans for ESPO.



Sujata De, Paediatric ENT Surgeon, Alder Hey Children's Hospital, Liverpool, UK; Chair of the ESPO 2023 Local Programme Committee.

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You've been a consultant paediatric ENT surgeon for 15 years. How did you end up specialising in paediatrics, and subsequently with an interest in craniofacial?

I chose paediatrics because as a trainee I loved working in Alder Hey Hospital, the children's hospital in Liverpool, and I had a bunch of really lovely trainers, who became my colleagues. Working with children is always rewarding, and paediatric ENT has a wide variety of conditions – from relatively simple to highly complex. I ended up with an interest in craniofacial as I did my Fellowship in Great Ormond Street Hospital and had a chance to get some craniofacial experience there. Liverpool is one of four national craniofacial units in England, and part of that service is ENT, so when I was appointed, I brought back my skills and that became my role. I am proud of my involvement in the MDT and the fact that I've changed practice such that fewer children with syndromic craniofacial synostoses now end up with a tracheostomy.

You are on the programme committee for ESPO 2023 – one of the largest international paediatric ENT conferences. How did you become involved in this?

Back in 2016 my colleague, Professor Ray Clarke, mentioned he'd be interested in hosting the conference in Liverpool – we have a fantastic conference centre that's been used for ENT conferences in the past, so we knew we had the infrastructure to deliver. With Prof Clarke, we produced a bid that we presented to ESPO council in 2018 and we were lucky enough to be awarded it. The conference was supposed to be held in 2022, but with COVID-related delays, will now be May 2023.

The theme for ESPO 2023 is 'Science, clinicians and families – better together'. What can we look forward to from the conference?

Something that's unique to ESPO 2023 is our focus on simulation and innovation - we have a dedicated stream purely for each of these. We're planning lots of hands-on



The ESPO team at Liverpool's famous waterfront posing with The Beatles.



Su and the team flying the ESPO flag in front of the children's hospital, Alder Hey in the Park.

experience for delegates to participate in, including a variety of practical simulations.

We've also invited quite a bit of patient and parent input into the programme, both directly and indirectly. We have a few patients coming to speak at the conference in person about the specific challenges relating to their paediatric ENT issues. We are very keen to hear the patient voice - there's a patient advocate group speaking during one of the innovation sessions looking at how we can be more family friendly in our practice as paediatric ENT surgeons.

We've also got a session in the general stream on working with our colleagues. As paediatric ENT surgeons, we do work very closely with other specialities such as respiratory, gastroenterology, paediatrics, allergy, cardiology and safeguarding, so there is a session that's looking specifically at working together so we can provide the best care to our patients.

In addition, we're not forgetting science, and how innovation and new developments are going to impact how we can best care for children in our speciality. For example, new therapies for hearing loss, lympho-vascular malformations and new surgical instruments.

The final session in the innovation stream is a World Cup Quiz aimed at our young colleagues. Tasks will include competitions such as speed-assembling a bronchoscope. It will be an opportunity to be competitive in a fun and educational way and potentially win a prize for your country!

What makes Liverpool a great place to host?

Apart from the great conference facilities, which are located right on the waterfront of the River Mersey, Liverpool is just an excellent place to visit. It's in close proximity to other places you might want to go if you like the outdoors, such as the mountains and coastline in North Wales, the Peak

District and the Lake District. If you don't want to travel, Liverpool has more than enough to keep you occupied: fantastic views, architecture, two huge football clubs, museums, art galleries, an amazing food scene and plenty of places to enjoy a tipple. There's a reason it's been chosen for Eurovision! Not to mention the musical heritage - if anyone's noticed the ESPO 2023 logo, they'll see the nod to the four lads from Liverpool. Is that enough?

I'd also recommend 'Ray's Rambles' Blog on the ESPO website (www.espo2023.org) for some fascinating insights into Liverpool's history.

Any skills you've enhanced through this process?

Yes - quite a bit. As a natural introvert, I've had to come out of my shell and talk to a lot more people than I would normally and, thanks to things like Zoom and email, that's been made quite a bit easier for me. In addition, I'm now super proud of my Excel skills which have grown immeasurably! I've created a super spreadsheet that involves 10 sessions on each of seven streams and I'm delighted with how I can make the sheets link with each other and analyse things, like how many female speakers from a particular country are talking on a particular stream. It goes without saying that our organisational and teamworking skills have been utilised for something that's such a huge undertaking - not just the scientific programme, but also developing the social programme and all the practicalities that go along with that.

You've been on numerous bodies, including ESPO, BAPO and Health Education England North-West, whilst being a full-time clinician - any tips for keeping it all together?

I think this is an important topic - you need to remember you can't be excellent at everything at the same time, and that's

ok. You have to divide your workload into manageable chunks. Currently, my first thought when I wake up in the morning is my ESPO spreadsheet. I anticipate that's how it will be for the next six months, and I accept there might be other roles I wish to undertake but these will just have to take second place until ESPO is finished. I do appreciate there is an element of multitasking, but you can't be fantastic at everything all at the same time.

Your Twitter bio mentions you're an admirer of Iceland - what is it you admire?

I'm a staunch feminist and I'm aware that in 1975 all of the women in Iceland went on strike; they decided not to do any of their domestic chores for one day only and, as a result of that action, legislation was put in place to forward women's rights in Iceland - I thought that was a fantastic story. If a whole population can make change in that way, then I've got to admire them. Apart from that, I believe it's a very beautiful place and I'd like to go visit sometime. As luck would have it, there are now direct flights from Liverpool to Reykjavik! Maybe after ESPO?

Any tips for aspiring paediatric ENT surgeons?

It's a very rewarding speciality, we are also a very friendly subgroup of ENT surgeons and I think that's quite widely acknowledged. If you do want to pursue it, you will be actively supported by your seniors - we always welcome people who show an interest. Attend as many conferences and courses as you can and get to know your subject. Just be sure it's the right thing for you - you've got to love it.

The 16th Congress of the European Society of Paediatric Otorhinolaryngology (ESPO) is being held in Liverpool, UK, on 20-23 May 2023. Conference registration is now open.

INTERVIEWED BY



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