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***Blastocystis* sp. - a harmless commensal to a harmful pathogen**

Suresh K, Arunchelvan R and Chandramathi S

University of Malaya, Malaysia

The talk will highlight a long quest to search for answers surrounding one of the most enigmatic organisms called *Blastocystis* sp. Many aspects of the organism were constantly enshrouded with questions. With every new finding there arose conflicting reports, confusing data and more importantly discrepancies especially on the parasite's role in causing disease. Hence *Blasocystis* sp. was dismissed and considered only to be another commensal along with million other organisms in the human gut. Paradoxically, it is one of the most commonly found organism in any stool survey. The talk details key highlights since 1990 on our contributions made to unravel the biology, life cycle, prevalence, genotypic expressions, phenotypic characteristics, pathogenicity, drug treatment, apoptosis and association to irritable bowel

syndrome and colorectal cancer. In the early 90's, there were scanty and sporadic number of reference papers, lack of expertise to provide guidance and most of all the lack of encouragement to proceed this path from sceptics who were sure that this *Blastocystis* sp. quest would be unprofitable. The presentation will trace the historical development of research on *Blastocystis* sp. and at the same time highlights the thought processes and paradigm shifts which contributed to the newer insights on this organism. The talk will highlight how this once considered harmless commensal has been associated with colorectal cancer, stress and irritable bowel syndrome.

e: suresh@um.edu.my



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