

Travel Award report – Annual Meeting of the European Society for Gene and Cell Therapy (ESGCT) 2016 in Florence, Italy

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The XXIVth meeting of the European Society for Cell and Gene Therapy taking place from 18th to 21st of October in the beautiful city of Florence in Italy was for the first time a joint meeting together with the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) and furthermore in collaboration with the Italian Association of Biologists working on Cells and Differentiation (ABCD) and therefore much bigger than the ESGCT meetings organized before. A record number of participants from all over the world but also from industry partners presenting their companies attended the meeting. In line with this, also the highest number of abstracts submitted was leading to a huge number of posters presented at the meeting, providing great opportunities to get to know the work of many people in the field. Although so many people attended the meeting, it never felt overcrowded because of the nice venue that was chosen for this conference. The Palazzo dei Congressi consists of different buildings with a small garden in the middle. All oral presentations and posters were distributed over the whole area so there was enough space especially to view all the posters and the small walks in between the sessions were really nice to keep the concentration during the sessions.

During the poster sessions there was enough time to have a look around and get to know new people and interesting research. The time was flying by during the session in which I was presenting my poster as I had some really nice conversations and could improve the way to present my poster as this was the first time that I presented this topic at an international conference.

The abstracts selected for oral presentation were all very interesting and there was a good balance between the different research areas that were presented. There were two talks that really impressed me especially. The first one was given by Hans Clevers who was opening the conference with his talk about “Lgr5 stem cell-based organoids in human disease”. The way he presented was almost forcing to listen to him and he had so much enthusiasm about what he is doing that you could feel how much effort he is putting into his research. The data he was presenting were clear and well structured. The (colorful) pictures of tissue sections were self-explaining and convincing without any further comment and everything looked as if it was so easy and clear to see what the mechanisms behind these actions are (although all researchers know that it is never as clear and easy as presented). This talk was like a big bang that was opening a wonderful conference and giving me the feeling that it was the right decision to start a career in academic research. You can't do anything about being excited when you see such beautiful data like this.

The second talk that was really inspiring for me was actually a whole session about Gene Therapy in the market from gsk. It was nice to see that, although taking quite a lot of time, gene therapy strategies that were once upon a time developed in the lab are not only going to clinical trial phases but that they can also really reach the market and become commercially available for a larger number of patients. As I am also working in the field of lentiviral gene therapy I was more than happy to see that the work and effort that we are putting in our work can in the end be a cure for patients that desperately need our help. In this session especially Julie Venners Christensen, who was talking about the patient management during gene therapy treatment at gsk, was interesting because she was talking about a point of view that you usually don't see in the lab. The way she was talking about her

work with the patients was emotional and you could really feel how important this work is for her, especially because she was talking about her personal experiences as the mother of a diseased child. She did not only make clear how important her work is, but also how important the work of the researchers is that are building up the first stones of this bridge towards a commercially available therapy. This is what people working in translational research are aiming for and she did an awesome job in reminding everybody why we take all these hurdles without stopping: in the end, to save the life of patients.

Altogether, I enjoyed the ESGCT meeting in Florence a lot and could benefit from it with new contacts, new knowledge and new inspiration for my work. I would like to thank the GSCN again for awarding me with this travel grant and thereby giving me the opportunity to attend this wonderful meeting.