British Society for Matrix Biology spring meeting 3-4 April 2017

Matrix proteoglycans: active participants in cell-ECM communication

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I am a final year PhD student in Immunology and Transplantation. My current project is about Heparan Sulfate, a glycosaminoglycan implicated in the early stage of rejection as it is responsible for the leukocyte migration into the graft. I was very grateful to be awarded a Graduate School travel grant to attend the British Society for Matrix Biology spring meeting in Oxford at which I presented a poster. Being at an early stage of my career I wanted to expand my knowledge and network of contacts in immunology, organ transplantation and proteoglycans.

In fact this meeting was a chance for me to be confronted to the latest advances and findings in my field. Additionally I had the opportunity to catch up with the scientists I met at a fantastic Gordon conference in Boston last year about proteoglycans. The BSMB spring meeting is a national conference but considering that most speakers were international it was an excellent update on the current research being done. The main conference took place over two days. The first day was focused on proteoglycans in health, disease and ageing. Professor Dulce Papy Garcia gave an update on her current research about Alzheimer and Heparan Sulfate 3-O sulfation. She showed very nice results about the interaction between heparin and the protein tau. Her talk was of great interest to me as my research focuses on Heparan Sulfate3-O sulfation. Additionally at a Nordic workshop, Dr Oskar Hallgren showed the alteration of Heparan sulfate in idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. I had the chance to have a very stimulating chat with him as my data in renal fibrosis are very similar to what he observed in the lungs. Professor Marion Kutsche-Gullberg gave a very thought-provoking talk about the relation between RNA levels of Heparan Sulfate (HS) modifying enzymes and the actual HS structure on both the extracellular matrix and the cells. She warned most scientists to take extra care when looking at RNAs levels as they might not reflect what is actually seen on the cell surface.

I presented my poster on both days and had incredible feedback from most scientists in the field who offered helpful insight about my data and future direction. Finally I felt very lucky to be awarded best poster presentation award.

This travel award was a chance for me to accomplish important steps in my career: presenting my results, meeting the leaders, broadening my knowledge and shaping my future. It was also an excellent opportunity for me to find mentors for my future career as Postdoctoral fellow. I would like to express again my gratitude to the graduate school for supporting me.