

Gordon Research Seminar & Conference on Proteoglycans Proctor Academy, Andover, NH, USA, 7-13 July 2018

The Proteoglycans Gordon Research Conference (GRC) is a small meeting of around 200 researchers, making it the ideal environment for networking with other researchers in the field. It takes place at a beautiful academy in New Hampshire, with lots of opportunities for activities such as sports, swimming and even wine tasting, meaning that the environment is very relaxed and ideal for meeting new people. This, in combination with the very high quality of research presented at the conference, has given me many new ideas for collaborations, new experiments and fellowship applications.

The GRC is preceded by the GRS, or Gordon Research Seminar, which is aimed at early career researchers. I was selected to give an oral presentation at the GRS, which led to some very useful feedback on my work and has already inspired some new experiments. The GRS was also a great chance to meet researchers at my own level, as well as to hear advice from and talk with mentors such as Glenn Prestwich and Liliana Schaefer. The arrival of many very well-established and famous researchers at the start of the GRC could easily be a daunting experience, but the GRS acts as a brilliant introduction and really helps with the sense of community, which is one of the nicest things about the whole conference.

At the GRC itself, I presented a poster, and I was very grateful to receive a poster award from the conference organisers. Discussions at my poster helped me to form a plan for an initial publication, by identifying the focus that would be of most interest to other researchers. My postdoc position is based on developing a fully-defined *in vitro* model of breast cancer progression, and my main interest in attending this conference was to understand how I might be able to use this model to study cell-matrix interactions. I found many of the talks highly relevant for this application, in particular several of the talks that focussed on the influence of hyaluronan on mechanobiology, and the role of ECM on fibroblast activation and contractility.

I am very grateful to ISMB for providing financial support to allow me to attend the GRC, and would highly recommend the proteoglycans GRC to anyone in the field.