

**ASMB Biennial Meeting (Oct 14-17, 2018)  
“ECM Microenvironments in Disease, Aging and Regeneration”**

This year’s ASMB Biennial Meeting was held against the stunning backdrop of Red Rock Canyon in Las Vegas, USA, with a theme that is highly in-line with my research interests – ECM microenvironments in Disease, Aging and Regeneration. I came from a cancer microenvironment background, but it wasn’t until I started working in my current post-doc position two years ago that I start to truly appreciate how complex the field of matrix biology is. This conference has been incredibly rewarding and I left feeling that I’ve learnt a lot and generated good ideas for future experiments, as well as building networks and setting up potential collaborations with colleagues around the world. The schedule was tight and jam-packed with many scientifically exhilarating talks, e.g. Tom Barker (University of Virginia, USA) on integrin switching on Fibronectin-rich ECM as a disease driver, David Lyden (Weill Cornell Medical College, USA) on the characterisation of exomeres/exosomes, Shireen Lemande (Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, Australia) on iPSC as a 3D cartilage disease model, Kota Saito (Akita University, Japan) on the secretory pathway in fibrosis, to name but just a few. However, it was the Awardee talks that were truly inspirational – Alexandra Naba (University of Illinois at Chicago, USA), Rachel Lennon (University of Manchester, UK), and the giants in the ECM field Jean Schwarzbauer (Princeton University, USA) and Billy Hudson (Vanderbilt University, USA). Billy’s talk in particular, which was a retelling of the history of his background, his scientific research, as well as his efforts in public outreach (providing summer programmes for young people from underprivileged background), was incredibly moving and awe-inducing, and reminded me what kind of impact I would like to have as a scientist, and how I should continuously strive towards it.

In addition to hearing all the new research within the field, I had the privilege of giving a short talk on my current work, which provided an excellent opportunity to practice my presentation skills in front of an international audience, as well as getting feedback from a field of experts. The additional poster session provided further opportunities for me to discuss my research, and I was given invaluable advice from perspectives that, as a young scientist, I have overlooked. I was also asked to chair a women-mentoring-women breakfast session, which was a very different but still rewarding experience, and I certainly hope the PhD student found my input as useful as I did from other more senior mentors at the general mentoring breakfast session the previous morning!

I have really enjoyed the meeting, and would like to thank ASMB for organising such a great programme. I would also like to thank ISMB for awarding me with a Travel Grant, which allowed me to attend and present at an international conference. This conference has given me a refreshed enthusiasm coming back to the labs, and new ideas as well as collaborators to further my research endeavours.