

*Report from Wing Ying Chow, ASMB Meeting 2018*

I attended the American Society of Matrix Biology (ASMB) meeting for the first time this year, enabled by a travel grant from the ISMB. Although my PhD involved developing methods of studying collagen proteins by solid-state NMR, I see myself as a relative newcomer to the matrix biology community. Therefore, I was very grateful for the opportunity to deepen my knowledge, hear new developments in the field, and broaden my network.

The meeting started on a Sunday at the Red Rock Casino & Hotel in Las Vegas. It opened with parallel guest sessions, during which I attended the Histochemical Society session that had a particular focus on reproducibility, with valuable discussions. One of the first sessions of the ASMB meeting is on Collagens, which are of obvious particular interest for me. It was chaired by Sergei Budko, who presented a beautiful talk on the structural mechanism of the assembly of collagen IV.

The second and third days started with a networking breakfast. These were one of the reasons that I was drawn to the ASMB meeting -- it is unusual to find these type of mentoring events as part of an official program, and I appreciated the insights shared by more senior scientists in a friendly and relaxed setting.

During the conference, I presented a poster on one of my projects on collagen structural modifications in alkaptonuria patients. Despite NMR being a rather niche technique in the matrix biology field, I had several pleasant conversations and gained new ideas on how to refine the publication that we are currently preparing on the project. Moreover, as I will be co-chairing the Collagen Gordon Research Seminar (GRS) in 2019 with Charlotte Gistelink, it was great to meet in person and discuss the program and sponsorship plan, also with Emmy Gordon, the chair of the Gordon Research Conference. I also visited posters by PhD students and postdocs who are working on collagen, inviting those with interesting work to attend and present at the GRS next year.

Apart from collagens, I was able to broaden my knowledge in other topics, of which the most fascinating were the trainee-led session on extracellular vesicles and the presentations by Jean Schwarzbauer, Jared Saunders, Weilan Ye and Thomas Barker relating to fibronectin networks.

Last but not least, there were two presentations that really stood out in how they emphasized the human aspect of science. The first is the tribute to Patricia Keely, whose work in breast cancer was presented along with a sense of her personality and resilience. The second is the presentation by Billy Hudson, who received the ISMB Distinguished Investigator Award, where he described his career in collagen IV as a detective story. While it is a gripping journey that started from trying to understand the rare Goodpasture's autoimmune syndrome and led to his recent contributions on the evolutionary origin of the sulfilimine bond, it was also inspiring to see how he personally cared about and credited all the people who were part of this journey. From the surviving patient who donated many antibodies to his research, to his family and his mentors, and more recently to the high school students who completed his Aspirnauts summer research program to start their own scientific journey despite adverse childhood experiences, one can clearly see that generosity and sincerity are as much a hallmark as the brilliance of his scientific career.

I thank the ISMB again for giving me the chance to attend this excellent meeting and I certainly hope to return again.