Gordon Research Seminar and Conference on Proteoglycans

Andover, New Hampshire, USA, July 2018

Thank you to the ISMB for the Travel Award to attend and present at the Gordon Research Conference (GRC) on Proteoglycans in 2018. I'm a post-doc working in University Grenoble Alpes, France, mentored by Dr. Ralf Richter (University of Leeds, UK) investigating the physical mechanisms by which immune cells home to the blood vessel wall, with a particular focus on CD44+ immune cells binding to hyaluronan in the glycocalyx. I was very keen to attend my second GRC on Proteoglycans after thoroughly enjoying my first in 2016.

Before the GRC, I attended the Gordon Research Seminar (GRS), where it was great to meet up with people who I had met in 2016, and meet new faces too. The atmosphere was friendly and approachable and there were very interesting scientific discussions both after the oral presentations and at the poster sessions. A new session that was held this year was a panel discussion with Glenn Prestwich (Symic Bio, USA), Liliana Schaefer (University of Frankfurt, Germany) and the GRS chairs Aaron Petrey (Cleveland Clinic, USA) and Rogier Reijmers (Leiden University Medical Center, The Netherlands). This interactive session was a great addition, in which advice was given to the GRS audience of young researchers on how to progress in academic science.

Following the GRS, the GRC attendees arrived to bring the total number of attendees to 200. Tony Day (University of Manchester, UK) and Carol de la Motte (Cleveland Clinic, USA) did a fantastic job and organised excellent scientific sessions, particularly in terms of the variety of disciplines covered, quality of research and level of discussion after each talk. Masters students, PhD students, post-docs and principal investigators all contributed to the oral presentations and were actively encouraged to take part in the discussions. From the first day until the last, the science was stimulating and exciting. For instance, in the first session of 'Late-breaking topics', we heard from Spencer Freeman (The Hospital for Sick Children, Canada) about how CD44 has a newly discovered role in co-ordinating the activity of other receptors by forming transmembrane pickets. On the last day, Cathy Merry (University of Nottingham, UK) gave a fantastic talk about developing well-defined 3D biomaterials for growing cell cultures *in vitro* for improved models of disease and development. Such talks were particularly inspiring and I have taken away a wealth of knowledge and new ideas for future endeavors.

During the conference, I presented a poster and presented a short talk in the session 'Proteoglycan-based technologies and treatments'. I received interesting comments from the audience in the discussion session immediately after my talk, as well as afterwards during the social events. Such discussions have highlighted that different aspects of my project have potentially interesting applications to other contexts that I hadn't realised before attending this conference, and so could serve to progress this work beyond my post-doctoral project.

In addition to the excellent opportunities to discuss scientific details, what I especially like about the GRS/GRC on Proteoglycans is the way it brings together industry and academia, with prestigious players from both being active participants in the meeting. In addition, this conference goes all out with social activities, having dedicated social chairs who organised a talent show, bird-watching and a whole range of events to take part in. Overall the GRS/GRC provided a fun, relaxed atmosphere for superb scientific discussion.

Dr. Heather Davies, University Grenoble Alpes, France