

GSCN Travel Award: Participation Report Annual GSCN Conference in Dresden, 2021

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University Venue: Center for Regenerative Therapies Dresden (CRTD), TU Dresden

Place and Date: Dresden, 06.10.-08.10.2021

First of all, I would like to thank the GSCN for giving me the opportunity to attend the 9th annual GSCN Conference in Dresden last October. After the last annual conference in 2020 had to take place as an online conference due to the corona pandemic, the conference finally took place in person again. However, corona protective measures such as a reduced number of participants and a hygiene concept with regular tests had to be observed to make the annual meeting as safe as possible for everyone. I think all of the participants, me as well, were very happy to attend a real, physical and not virtual meeting in 2021 as networking as well as presenting and discussing of research data function better in person than in a virtual room.

Every year the German Stem Cell Network invites to their annual conference, where stem cell researcher of Germany come together to present and discuss their current research as well as hot topics within the field of stem cells. Moreover, networking is a central aspect of the GSCN and especially for young scientists and early-stage researchers and thus, the conference provides a platform for learning and gaining new insights into the field, but also for improving networking and presentation skills. The conference program was divided into the following sessions: stem cells in disease modeling and drug development, somatic stem cells and development, computational stem cell biology, Organoids: new models for diseases, stem cells in regenerative therapies I and II, stem cells in ageing and disease, pluripotency and reprogramming and hematopoietic stem cells. Within this program there were five keynote lectures from international stem cell researchers like Sara Wickström (Helsinki/Münster), Takanori Takebe (Cincinnati), Alfonso Arias Martinez (Barcelona), Janet Rossant (Toronto) and Prisca Liberali (Basel). Hot topics of the conference were 3D culture and organoids as well as developmental biology. I really enjoyed the keynote lectures, especially the lecture from Alfonso Arias Martinez, who is not only a great scientist but also a great entertainer, about gastruloids as an ESC based model for mammalian gastrulation and body plan engineering showing that the process of gastrulation can be visualized by using gastruloids derived from human pluripotent stem cells. Moreover, there was a big industry session, where many different companies and partners of the GSCN presented their own research as well as products to give

insights into the current and challenging research within industry. Furthermore, on the last day of the conference was the scientific working group session divided into clinical and regulatory affairs, career development and technologies in stem cell research, where new and exciting trials and approaches were presented such as the generation of clinical-grade human iPS cells with immune compatibility and application strategies (Boris Greber, RheinCell Therapeutics, Langenfeld; Ulrich Martin, Hannover Medical School). Within the career development session, there was a very exciting and interactive workshop with Nele Haasen from konteam about successful conversation with advisors and PIs. Here, every participant could share their own experiences and Nele gave a good overview about communication strategies and how to perform within a successful conversation to make sure that content and aims of the conversation are clear and presented correctly.

Furthermore, I always like the poster session and benefit from it as the poster session gives me the possibility to present and discuss my own research data with other scientists and to improve my networking and presentation skills. For the first time, this year's poster session was an online poster session. Posters were created with an iPoster tool, were available the whole conference (and afterwards) and presented on big touch screens. Although the presentation of a poster on a screen was new and challenging as the screens were very sensitive, the iPoster tool offers a new way of designing a very informative and visual poster as videos, slide shows, various text boxes, etc. can be used.

Also new is the GSCN mentoring program, which started at the GSCN conference in Dresden with a first workshop about mentoring and get-together in the evening at the networking event to meet the mentor, the other mentees and organization team. I am very proud to be part of the first GSCN mentoring program and the conference was a great start of the program. One of the highlights of the conference was the networking event at Carolaschlösschen, where everyone has the chance to chat and exchange with friends, colleagues and other scientists in a very relaxed and nice atmosphere. The conference as well as the GSCN is a great platform to keep in touch with friends, colleagues and scientists and to be updated about the current research and trends within the field of stem cell research.