

GSCN Travel Award: ISSCR 2024 Annual Meeting

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The 2024 annual meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) took place in Hamburg, Germany. More than 4,000 scientists from around the world gathered from the 10th to 13th of July at the Congress Center Hamburg to participate in a vibrant program exhibiting the latest advancements in stem cell research. For me as a first-time attendee at the ISSCR, the lively atmosphere with thousands of scientists coming together, discussing their recent work and foster collaborations left a profound impression on me.

Leading experts presented their advancements in seven plenary sessions, addressing topics, such as pluripotency and development, disease modeling and drug discovery, clinical applications and many more. One of the highlights for me was the plenary session on "Exploring the basic principles of development using stem cells", where I particularly appreciated the talks by Maria Elena Torres-Padilla and Mansi Srivastava. Another exciting presentation was given by Clive Svendsen, who talked about the latest advances in ALS research and about stem cells in space and the limitations of growing stem cells on the ISS. The concurrent sessions were equally fascinating. However, there were numerous concurrent sessions running in parallel, making it difficult to choose just one. Of particular interest to me was the session on "Advancing *in vitro* models", where David Elliot presented the development of increasing the cellular heterogeneity in heart tissue models and using this model for subsequent drug screening. Another interesting talk in this session by Helmuth Gerhart was on the creation of a timeline for personalized drug screening based on patient-derived organoids. As an early career scientist, I attended the educational session "Career pluripotency: pioneering paths in academic and non-academic sectors", where the audience was encouraged to ask questions to specialists from a wide range of science-related fields. There were many questions and a lively discussion, focusing on the role of women in science, how this has changed for the better in recent decades and where is still room for improvement.

While the plenary and concurrent sessions took place throughout the morning and afternoon, the majority of participants gathered in the exhibition hall in the late afternoon, for the industry exhibition and poster session. The industry showcased cutting-edge materials and techniques for laboratory use, providing a comprehensive overview of potential advancements. The poster session was organized around the industry exhibition and facilitated productive discussions. I got the opportunity to present my own results as a poster in one of these sessions, which were incredibly lively and well attended, allowing me to engage in meaningful conversations with other attendees and gain valuable feedback for my project. The informal setting fostered easy networking with both young scientists and experienced researchers. Another great opportunity to connect to other researchers was the GSCN meet-up hub, which allowed me to meet many scientists within the network and those interested in connecting with it. The WunderBar event organized by GSCN was also amazing, offering a perfect blend of networking and socializing in a relaxed environment.

In conclusion, I am extremely grateful for being awarded the GSCN travel grant, which supported me in attending the ISSCR 2024 Annual Meeting. The experience to be part of an international conference, present my own work, interact and network with fellow stem cell scientists has been incredibly rewarding. I would like to thank the GSCN for the support, enabling this unique opportunity to connect to other scientists, to mature and to learn.

Sincerely,

Anna Hansknecht