

GSCN Travel Award: ISSCR Annual Meeting 2025 in Hong Kong

Participant: Miriana Dardano, Leibniz Laboratories for Biotechnology and Artificial Organs (LEBAO), Hannover Medical School (MHH)

Venue: Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, China

This year's Annual Meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research took place from the 11th to the 14th of June in the beautiful city of Hong Kong. Over 250 talks and 1400+ posters were presented at the conference. Posters and talks were grouped based on specific topics; the talks were divided into: plenary sessions, where selected elite scientists presented groundbreaking science in their respective fields of interest; award and memorial lectures, to recognize recipients of prestigious awards and honor pioneers in stem cell science; career-focused panels, offering insightful advice from various industries and successful scientists at different career stages; focus sessions and showcases, where sponsoring companies had the opportunity to share their latest products and the science made possible by them; as well as multiple concurrent track sessions, where chosen scientists presented their cutting-edge discoveries.

The track sessions were classified into: clinical application, of cell therapies and tissue engineering research; global stakeholder initiatives, exploring emerging issues in stem cell research and regenerative medicine; pluripotency and development, for understanding pluripotency and lineage commitment; disease modeling and drug discovery, exploring advances in using stem cells in vivo and in vitro; organ generation and regeneration, exploring research advances in stem cell and tissue biology; and somatic stem cells and cancer, where somatic stem cell homeostasis, aging, and cancer biology were investigated. I found the sessions on clinical applications, pluripotency and development, disease modeling, and organ generation/regeneration of great interest, as I am working with human pluripotent stem cell-derived organoids to recapitulate specific human embryonic stages (cardiogenesis and hematopoiesis), in order to provide a model for developmental studies, disease modeling, and for testing pharmacological compounds potentially affecting the modeled embryonic tissues/organs.

Many of the talks and company showcases were extremely interesting in my opinion. For example, the showcase from Acro, presented by Rosanna Zhang and titled "Applications and Prospects of Organoid Technology in Drug Screening and Toxicology Testing", provided an overview of the off-the-bench organoids developed by the company, which could potentially be applied to some of our projects. The keynote speech by Tao Tan, PhD, "Ex Utero Embryogenesis of Non-Human Primate Embryos and Beyond", highlighted the latest advancements in understanding the early stages of primate embryonic development. Another highlight was the keynote speech by Gordon Keller, PhD, "Modeling Hematopoiesis and Cardiovascular Development with Human Pluripotent Stem Cells", which presented cutting-edge research on human cardiac and hematopoietic development—my specific field of research.

I really enjoyed the poster sessions too; I had the opportunity to present my latest data, receive insightful comments from peers working in the organoid and hematopoiesis fields, gain new ideas for my projects, and even meet potential new collaborators. The poster sessions were accompanied by drinks and delicious finger food, creating a comfortable and inviting environment.

Thanks to the GSCN Meet-up Hub and the WunderBar Evening, which were perfectly organized by the GSCN organizers, it was possible to connect with fellow participants and GSCN members.

Overall, I truly enjoyed the conference, the science, the beautiful city of Hong Kong, and the engaging scientific community of the ISSCR. I am grateful to the GSCN for awarding me the prestigious GSCN Travel Award, which helped make this experience possible. Many thanks for the much-appreciated support! I truly recommend joining both the ISSCR and certainly the GSCN community!

Miriana Dardano