

GSCN Travel Award Report: 21st Annual Meeting of International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) 2023 in Boston

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Venue: Boston Convention Center, Boston, USA

Firstly, I want to express my utmost appreciation and gratitude to the German Stem Cell Network (GSCN) for this great opportunity to present my current PhD work to the scientific community and to attend the world largest and most prestigious stem cell meeting. In fact, it was a very fruitful experience, I received valuable input regarding my project and interest in potential collaboration with an international partner.

The 21st annual meeting of the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) was from the 14th to 17th of June in the vibrant city of Boston, Massachusetts. It featured around 200 speakers, over 900 posters, approximately 4,000 scientists and industry professionals from over 75 countries. The seven plenary sessions as well as multiple concurrent sessions covered several topics related to the stem cell field, such as clinical translation of cell therapies, modelling development and diseases, reprogramming and organoids. I enjoyed all the talks but especially enjoyed the plenary talk of Magdalena Zernicka-Goetz entitled “Building embryo models from stem cells to understand self-organization” which was amazing how they were able to build embryo-like structures that were able to self-organize to a point beyond post-implantation to help understand and explore mechanisms of early organogenesis. The most interesting talks were related to my PhD project, which was scalable manufacturing and clinical translation of iPSC derived immune cells. However, it was interesting to follow the talks in the clinical applications session in the field of universal T cell-based therapies.

Another hallmark of the ISSCR annual meeting that I would like to emphasize is the role played by the industry partners, supporting so many events for free food and drinks, jokes aside. The industry supported sessions and exhibition was very impressive, its clear that industry is heavily invested in working with academics in order to provide better and innovative solutions in many aspects of our field i.e. from cell culture, automated scale-up, GMP solutions and many more. During the exhibition session I was able to meet with some familiar faces I met at GSCN meetings and also connect with new colleagues.

Also, the poster sessions were organized in an unnatural way, happening around mid-day, resulted in not so much attendance to the poster sessions despite that I was able to engage in interesting discussions with scientists, experienced post-docs and PIs. Some of the interesting posters I enjoyed visiting were “Developing iPSC-derived macrophages (iMACs) for off-the-shelf cell therapy – a versatile new cell type in the EVOcells platform for immunoncology and beyond”, “Advancing NK cell immunotherapies for ovarian cancer through a patient-specific organoid co-culture system”, “Generation of Functional CD8ab T-cells from iPSCs via Recapitulation of thymic Notch signaling using DLL4\VCAM1 Microbreads” and many more. The best evening was the social event “GSCN WunderBar” organized by GSCN at the Rosa Mexicana, which was perfectly organized.

Despite some of the challenges like the unnatural poster session timing, scarcity of food and coffee which was needed considering the jet lag. Nevertheless, I am pleased I had the opportunity to attend the conference, explore the city of Boston. In short, I would like to thank once again the GSCN for awarding me this travel grant to attend this fabulous conference and making this experience possible.

Kind Regards,
Fawaz Saleh

PS – Of Note, GSCN throws one of the best parties in my humble experience... 😊