

Report of Pancreatic Diseases Gordon Research Conference 2023

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Venue: Renaissance Tuscany Il Ciocco

The Pancreatic diseases GRC was a 5-day conference that took place in the secluded mountains of Il Ciocco near to Lucca in Italy. To my knowledge it is the only pancreatic conference that brings together experts from endocrine as well as exocrine oriented research providing an extensive but specific range of topics covered in the program. The presented scientific talks touched upon several important fields: pancreatic ductal adenocarcinoma; diabetes; exocrine-endocrine crosstalk in development, health and disease; pancreatic microenvironment and modelling of pancreatic diseases. The wide range of scientific topics seemed overwhelming at the beginning, however as the program progressed I really enjoyed learning how endocrine and exocrine parts of pancreas can be connected and how they affect each other in disease progression.

The presentation and poster sessions were very well designed in several non-parallel panels with each session including thoughtfully distributed amount of topic concerning endocrine and exocrine pancreatic diseases. In such way participation remained high throughout the whole duration of the conference with little separation among the experts boosting interesting and lively discussions.

One presentation that particularly captivated me was by Dr. Gioacchino Natoli as he introduced a novel approach for classifying PDAC based on morphological categorization in combination with single-cell sequencing of human patient samples. The research efforts made by Dr. Rohith Kulkarni were also remarkable, he explored the crosstalk between acinar cells and altered enzyme expression in the cells surrounding the islets of Langerhans. He highlighted the interconnection of acinar cells, β -cells, and the development of diabetes, demonstrating how mutations in acinar cell enzymes lead to the loss and dysfunction of β -cells.

Interestingly, there was a surprisingly high attendance of clinicians among the visitors and presenters, but not many industry sponsored sessions. At the beginning I was missing this side as I was looking forward for possible networking opportunities in industry field. However, later I found it as a positive circumstance as this setup pushed me to network more with clinicians. Considering I am conducting basic research I sometimes miss the direct connection to patient impact. Therefore, discussing with clinicians and attending talks about pancreatic cancer patients helped me find further motivation and sense of importance for contribution to the scientific research.

Finally, I was also very excited to present my poster titled “Molecular Characterization of Epigenetic Control and Gene Expression during Organoid Induced Plasticity at the Single Cell Level”. It was my first poster presentation at a conference therefore I was looking forward to discuss my project and receive feedback on my progression since the beginning of my PhD project. I really enjoyed the experience of being tested with questions, challenged with possible pitfalls and finally receiving a positive and very encouraging feedback as I won the price for third best poster in the category of graduate students.

Overall, I am very glad I could attend my very first international conference and learn from the leading experts in the field. I would like to express my gratitude for the financial support of German Stem Cell Network contributing to the possibility to attend the GRC. The experience allowed me to expand my

network and even opened a possibility of further collaboration as a result of discussion during poster presentation sessions. Furthermore, I have learnt a lot about latest research in the field and undoubtedly collected many valuable lessons and advice from fellow researchers.

Many heartfelt thanks,
Andrea Ruiz Sarvari