



Report of the GSCN non-PI Meeting

Online, 05 Oct. 2021, 09:30 – 18:15 h

General comments:

This year's in-person non-PI meeting took place at the Center for Regenerative Therapies in Dresden. We had this year 16 participants from German institutions and 2 from Hungarian research centers meeting ahead of the conference. In general, this is a higher turnover rate compared to previous online and in-person meetings, which is actually surprising considering the sudden change of conference location from Ulm to Dresden. Notably, in contrast to past non-PI meetings, we did not have participants from neighboring countries (Switzerland or Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland or France), indicating that the meeting is good in attracting scientist within Germany, but still not many abroad. Certainly, this is a point that can be improved by means of advertising GSCN internationally. Thus, the hybrid meeting format could be implemented in the future to reach out a broader audience which will further improve the GSCN visibility.

This year's get-together greatly allowed open fervent discussion between junior scientist in an informal setting about conceptual and technical challenges in the fields of stem cell research as well as methodological troubleshooting. Prior the meeting, we divided the introductory slides in the categories based on the research subject and we compartmentalized the talks based on the shared content so that attendees could follow the talks easier and get to know the other attendees in their field faster. Getting to know other researchers from a similar field before the main GSCN conference was critical as it allowed attendees to get together during the following conference days much easier. During the introductory talks, participants exchanged the main ideas of their research project, critical information about protocols and procedures, latest technologies, reagents for cell culture and molecular biology as well as asked advice for open questions.

Moreover, we dedicated a substantial proportion of the meeting's schedule to talk about the current Academic Term Contract Act (Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz) and its impact in the professional and social development of non-PI (stem cell) researchers in Germany (see main points listed below). We invited a representative from the labor union, presenting facts about the ongoing challenges and planned modifications of the Amendment upcoming year. Furthermore, we could not resist comparing how different people and research institutions reacted to COVID-19 pandemic two years into the pandemic, and how the new normality looks like for each one. Notably, German institutions had different levels of strict measurements depending on the region, reflecting the heterogeneity at scientific and at politic level, which then of course had an impact in the researchers day-to-day.

Notably, all attendees of the meeting were PhD students, junior and senior or post-docs, but unfortunately, no starting PI or start-up founder could join us to share her/his experiences and recommendation. We, however, consider including alternative non-academic careers to allow researchers to find out more information regarding the career choices.

All in all, the information acquired by the participants through the meeting is an absolute invaluable good essential in the career of junior scientists and will certainly help them and their labs progressing in their objectives. We are very glad to find out that some participants

have joined the meeting for their second or third time, and the many of rest have expressed their will to join next year. This, thus, indicates that the goal of the meeting in connecting non-PI scientists inland and abroad is successful. We ended the meeting with a dinner at a traditional Saxonian restaurant in the old city center.

Comments and conclusion on the Academic Term Contract Act:

1. Nobody of the attendees were on a permanent contract.
2. Our impression is that participants agree that at PhD level not having a permanent contract is not dramatic, since studies anyways are planned to last for a specific number of years (4-6 years normally).
3. However, at post-doctoral fellow stage, in particular at senior post-doc level, during which many scientists want for example to establish a family, make savings and improving the rent (among other things), not having at least a permanent contract could lead to financial instability and mental load.
4. Not surprisingly, and perhaps giving the fact that the ratio of remuneration to invested time/energy is very low in sciences, roughly 70% of attendees don't see themselves following an academic career. This is bad for two reasons: (a) German sciences loses many of their best researchers, as they prefer a non-academic path, or they move to other competitor countries with a more balanced life quality. (b) The post-docs that remain in Germany may not be able to fully commit – whether mentally or physically - to their duties, as they may turn a substantial amount of their focus on trying to find ways to stabilize their situation.
5. Both mentioned reasons decrease, obviously, the quality of German (stem cell) research and make the country less competitive.

Future improvements:

1. The purpose and format of the meeting should be better clarified. This time it was better than last year, but there is room for improvement. It is important that potential attendees understand that their presentation can be on a project, a problem, a plan, a technical aspect or other types of challenges, or to advertise a novel approach, product, technology.
2. Invite established PIs, non-academic researchers, and/or company founders to share his/her experiences and strategies.

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