

International Conference on Human and Translational Immunology, Rhodes, Greece
September 16-21, 2016

This past September, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to attend the 1st International Conference on Human and Translational Immunology, this year held in Rhodes, Greece. Similar to other Aegean Conferences, this meeting was specifically designed to host a small number (approximately 80) of work group leaders, post-doctoral fellows, PhD students, and technicians from all over the world in such a way that you were almost guaranteed to speak with everyone in attendance. Unlike large conferences, this conference did not hold parallel sessions – instead, all talks including keynotes were held in the same room, with everyone in attendance. This ensured that you did not need to “pick and choose”, and there was little distraction in-between talks. It also meant that, because there was no need to change rooms, the questions following the talks were more of an open platform for discussion.

Each session was centered around a broad theme, such as “immune mediated diseases”, “cancer immunology and immunotherapy”, or “systems immunology”. All of the blocks contained a mixture of human and mouse translational research. One of the most interesting talks discussed a unique human cohort in which healthy volunteers were infected with *Plasmodium falciparum*-infected mosquitos after receiving an anti-malarial immunization, and correlated immune responses to vaccination to protection against infection. The lead investigator, Bali Pulendran (Emory University), also shared some of their results using the same approach investigating other live attenuated vaccinations. In the “cancer immunology and immunotherapy” session, both Carl June (University of Pennsylvania) and Steve Schoenberger (La Jolla Institute for Allergy and Immunology) discussed their T-cell driven cancer therapies. Carl June, most well-known for his CD19-specific CAR-T cells, provided an update on on-going CAR-T cell clinical trials, including the use of checkpoint blockade therapy. Steve Schoenberger, meanwhile, described a new system-based approach to discover novel cancer antigens that could be targeted in patients. Several investigators in attendance use mouse models of infection or cancer to better understand the mechanisms of disease or the immune response. George Pavlakis (National Cancer Institute) shared their mouse and monkey studies showing an important role for IL-15 in anti-tumor and anti-HIV responses, studies which have paved the way for their on-going phase I clinical trial for metastatic cancer.

A major goal in attending this meeting was to increase my international network within the immunology field. In between each session, poster sessions were held providing people with the opportunity to further discuss their presentation, or engage other researchers with similar interests. Another highlight of this meeting was that breakfast, lunch, and dinner were spent together with the meeting’s attendees, and it was emphasized to not sit with the same group of people each time. This format provided wonderful networking opportunities that are not available at larger meetings.

In short, this conference was a great experience, and I hope to have the opportunity to return for similar conferences in the future. I am grateful to the NVvI for providing me with a travel grant, which made this experience possible.

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