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Each year the European committee for treatment and research in multiple sclerosis (MS) (ECTRIMS) organizes a big congress, where MS professionals from all over the world can share their knowledge on basic and clinical research in order to improve treatment of people affected with MS. This year the 31st edition took place from 7-10 October in Barcelona, Spain, and I was very pleased to be able to attend this congress for the first time.

To start the conference, 14 interesting teaching sessions were scheduled. I attended two of them, including the one about neuroimmunology in relation to MS pathophysiology and immunotherapy, which provided an excellent overview of the topic and the current insights. After these background sessions the parallel scientific sessions and satellite symposia started. With 8000 people attending, this was the largest ECTRIMS congress thus far, and the scientific input was immense, with over 50 sessions and nearly 1500 posters. A variety of topics was covered, including epidemiology, imaging, neurorepair, immunology and treatment. Since our research focusses on vitamin D and T&B cell biology in MS, I aimed to visit sessions regarding immunology in MS, environmental factors and the clinical trials with new immunomodulatory agents, including the B cell depleting drugs. Next to these, I also attended some sessions about, for instance, the differential diagnosis and about treatment challenges (progression).

During the congress two big poster sessions were scheduled in the afternoons of day 2 and day 3. Our late-breaking abstract with respect to our study on vitamin D and the conversion from relapsing remitting to secondary progressive MS was selected for the second poster viewing session, on day 3. With a great spot at the entrance of the poster hall many people could have a glimpse of our poster, and I was fortunate to share knowledge about and to discuss the topic with quite a lot of interested people.

The congress had brought me a lot. New insights and confirmations in research have taught me a lot. Also, the variety in talks was useful to look at MS from a broader perspective, and to place things in context. Furthermore, it was great to see and hear the renowned researchers in the field speak about their findings and to hear their opinions, and it was also great to be surrounded by so many people doing research at MS or are working with MS patients. Last but not least we had the opportunity to talk about research plans with other enthusiastic researchers, which might hopefully lead to new collaborations. Overall, I would say these days were absolutely encouraging and inspiring, and I am very grateful that, with this travel grant, NVVI supported my visit to the ECTRIMS 2015 conference in Barcelona.