

Early Career Immunologist in the Spotlight

ANDREW MORRISON

Postdoc at Leiden University Center for Infectious Diseases (LUCID)

[Home - LU-CID](#)

[Andrew Morrison, PhD - Leiden University Medical Center](#) | [LinkedIn](#)



Research for which the prize was received

My research is focused on developing *in vitro* models of the human immune system, more specifically of secondary lymphoid organs such as lymph nodes and tonsils. This started during my PhD where I focused on building lymph node models using stromal cells as a foundation, which were seen to be essential for controlling the immune response.

As a postdoc, I have moved into developing a tonsil model that can be used to study nasal vaccine responses in an organ-on-chip platform. Here, I am also part of larger projects that are investigating the intercontinental differences of human immunology too, which I find completely fascinating!

How will The Van Bekkum Thesis Award contribute to your future?

Of course, I am flattered to receive such a nice accolade that reflects my hard work and perseverance, but I think mostly it shows recognition and awareness for the exciting upcoming field of human immune models. It is really a future area I want to cement myself into where I can actively contribute to understanding, improving, and applying these models to science and society. It is encouraging to hear that the NVVI deem this work to be of value, so it further reassures me that what I am doing is something important and rewarding.

What do you see as the biggest challenge in immunology?

For me, I think it would be human heterogeneity. We've seen over the years already that successful drugs and therapies in animal models do not translate to humans from failed (and costly) clinical trials. This is where I see the advantage of human *in vitro* models, especially at this current stage when the FDA are continuously releasing new legislation to favour such models in pre-clinical trials. Though this still does not immediately solve the issues with donor differences and complexity of our immune system, so I believe with time and applying all the latest high-dimensional analysis techniques that we will get one step closer to personalised medicine.

What is your most important advice to young immunology researchers?

Oh, I have lots of advice, but the main one was from my first supervisor who told me to question everything. While I may not have actively expressed this externally in my PhD, internally I was non-stop. This kept me curious, motivated, and passionate to keep going when times were tough, which in turn made the work actually quite fun in the end. We all know a PhD is not easy, there are tough days, but they will pass, like most things in life. It is important to try to enjoy what you do, to have fun with experiments, and really it is a privilege to be able to do such unique work.

So yes, I would say stay curious and see where it leads you...and wherever that may be, you'll be grand!

How do you take care of a good work-home balance?

It's a tough question, and something I am still improving. When I started, I valued my own self-worth and identity to my PhD, which I believe is an unhealthy mindset and probably a common theme amongst PhDs. Halfway through after experiencing some personal stuff, I had an epiphany that there is so much more to life than your PhD (sounds cliché, I know).

It is hard to explain and almost paradoxical, but it made me lock in, organise, and accelerate the "work" side – where I would commit to some long days, be driven to get things done, make social sacrifices and prioritise like crazy. To compensate for this on the "life" side, I would do my best to completely switch off - starting with deleting the outlook app from my phone, saying no to things, taking full holidays, spending time with family & friends and really doing activities that energised me outside the lab.

It may not always be a 50:50 balance but going "all in" on each side of the ratio and not letting them overlap worked for me.