

Travel Report

The 15th International congress for immunology (ICI) was held from August 22 – August 27 in Milan Italy in the newly build Mico congress centre (the biggest congress centre in Europe). With estimations of more than 6000 participants the conference was seen as a big success.

The ICI is held every three years (the next one being in Melbourne, Australia in 2016) and is the biggest immunology congress in the world. It includes speakers from every immunology related field from epigenetics to cell signalling, to systemic biology and much more. There are literally people from all parts of the world attending the ICI (from mainland Europe, USA, Japan and Israel to lesser known Iran etc). A typical day in the meeting meant a general perspectives in immunology lecture held by one of the biggest names in the field for that subject. Followed by a plenary lecture and parallel symposia, then a lunch lecture followed by the workshops which were generally held by post- docs or PhDs. At the end of the day another plenary lecture followed.

I had the pleasure of hearing two lectures from Nobel prize laureates (Peter C. Doherty who won the Nobel prize for medicine in 1996 for his role in discovering how T-cells recognize antigens in combination with the major histocompatibility-complex and Jules A. Hoffman who won in 2011 for his role in discovering Toll-Like receptors (TLR) in the fruit fly) and see the award ceremony for the biggest cash prize money ever given to a scientist (4 million euro) namely the Else Kroner-Fresenius award for Ruslan Medzhitov (whose groundbreaking work into TLR triggering has led the way to link innate and adaptive immunity), as well as hear a lecture by him that linked inflammation, TLR triggering and many other things he is currently working on together.

With so many diverse subjects and so many interesting talks it was very hard to pick the ones I liked, because many overlapped with one another. While the plenary sessions were very general and mostly showed published data, the workshops gave a platform to more recent work some of which was still in a very early phase while others were a done story. It was interesting to see post-docs in their 40s and 50s presenting in these workshops together with 20-30 year olds. Interestingly the most obvious part was the fact that most scientific work was only done in mice or other animal models. As I work only with Patients this for me was a surprise, I had not realized that so many groups around the world worked only on mouse models.

On the last day of the congress I held my talk in the organ transplantation workshop which was very interesting. I received several interesting comments regarding the model system I was using and although it was the last day and everyone was tired from a very busy week people still showed up and were genuinely interested.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NVVI for granting me the travel grant which helped me get to Milan. I have learned a lot and the meeting really opened my eyes to the size and impact of the immunology field.