

Report AACR annual meeting 2025

By Mark Sweep, PhD candidate at Radboudumc (Medical Oncology & Medical BioSciences)

With help of the NVVI/DSI travel grant, I was able to attend the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR), taking place from April 25th until April 30th, 2025, in Chicago. Overall, it was an incredibly inspiring experience. The fun already started when creating a personal itinerary for the meeting, which was necessary with dozens of parallel sessions to choose from. The program consisted of a variety of cancer-related topics, such as cancer development, biomarkers to detect cancer, treatment of cancer, the tumor immune microenvironment, as well as quality of life and many others. In addition to science-oriented sessions, there were also sessions specifically tailored to early researchers. This included panel discussions on how to choose good mentors, how to find your own path as a researcher, and mental health. There was also a huge exposition, allowing you to learn about the newest techniques in the field, try to connect with companies to set up collaborations, or talk with editor-in-chiefs of several journals. This has given me many insights that you do not necessarily learn during your PhD in the lab, such as the point-of-view of companies and journal editors, which I definitely find valuable lessons for my future career.

During the big plenary talks, it was amazing to listen to well formulated scientific stories. It was valuable to observe how these stories are presented in a way that grabs your attention, no matter your specific field of interest. Some were incredibly adept at selling their research in a way that it almost convinces you it is the most breakthrough science you have ever heard. During such talks I have also learnt a lot about topics I had barely heard of, such as extrachromosomal DNA, which often gave rise to new ideas for my own research.

At the second to last day I had the pleasure to present my poster entitled *Re-activating suppressed tumor-infiltrating lymphocytes from melanoma brain metastases*. There was much interest in my poster, as I barely had a break during the three hour session. It was definitely worth it, as I had many good discussions, some new ideas for the project, as well as some potential collaborations! Apart from inspiring me, this also gave me a huge motivational boost to continue my project when getting home. So, all in all, I can definitely recommend going to the AACR at some point during your PhD!