

Travel Award report – 20th meeting of the American Society of Gene and Cell Therapy (ASGCT) 2017 in Washington DC

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The 20th annual meeting of the American Society of Gene and Cell Therapy took place from May 10th to 13th 2017 in Washington DC. For me it was the first time to visit a conference outside of Europe and the first time to travel to the USA. As one of my aims was right from the start to join an American conference during the course of my PhD time, I was really happy to fulfill this dream at the very end of my PhD period by visiting this wonderful conference. I would like to thank the GSCN for supporting this journey with a travel award.

The ASGCT meeting was bigger than the European conferences that I have been to so far. There were mostly six oral abstract presentation sessions in parallel and sometimes it was hard to decide which talks to attend as there were many interesting speakers in parallel. In some cases the decision was made by external circumstances as the rooms were at their maximum capacity and you had to wait in line outside of the room for somebody to leave it to be allowed to go inside. Most of these crowded sessions were in one of the hot topics “genome editing”, “AAV vectors”, or “CAR-T cells”. It was interesting to notice that interests in the field of gene therapy changed a lot during the last years. Former hot topics like iPSCs were barely present and also the big successes in the field of hematopoietic stem cell based gene therapies that even made their way to the industry were not as prominent as they used to be. The focus was pretty much on studies that are currently entering first clinical trials. Moreover, the industry exhibition was very prominent and also here, there were many companies that are mainly interested in translation from academia to the clinics. Most of the new contacts I established were representatives of different companies and it was very interesting to get to know their point of view regarding academic research. I was really happy that my abstract was selected for oral presentation and it was a great experience to give a presentation at such a big conference. Unfortunately, my presentation was scheduled at the very end of the conference and many people that I would have liked to talk to after presenting my research had already departed before my presentation. Nevertheless, it was a really exciting and instructive experience that allowed me to establish new contacts and I hope that I will be able to attend the 21st ASGCT meeting in 2018 as well.