

BSI Summer School 2017 – Travel Award Report

I was fortunate to have received a BSI Summer School Travel Award to attend the BSI Summer School 2017. I am a third year PhD student studying renal cancer at the University of Cambridge in the MRC Cancer Unit. More specifically, I am investigating transcription factor dependencies in clear cell renal cell carcinoma. While my PhD is not immunology related, I have recently become interested in the field of tumour immunology and I am hoping to move into that area of research for my postdoc. With only vague memories of my undergraduate immunology courses, I registered for the BSI Summer School to gain some general background knowledge on immunology.

The lectures covered a broad range of topics in immunology, each comprising a mixture of general background relevant to the speaker's area of expertise, and insights into the speaker's particular area of research. As a result, I came away with a broad overview of how immune responses are mediated; the biology of different immune cells and their products (including at a molecular / signalling level); techniques and approaches used in immunological research, and more advanced ideas emerging from current research in a variety of different immunology fields. Overall, this varied and thorough mixture of information provided an excellent foundation for me to build upon through further reading. The sheer complexity of the biology of immune responses, immune cells and their products was fascinating to learn, and was both humbling and inspiring. As a result, the BSI Summer School has further motivated me to pursue postdoctoral research in tumour immunology in order to work at the intersection between two highly complex and interesting areas of biology: cancer and the immune system.

There was plenty of opportunity to interact directly with the speakers during the tutorial sessions and in between lectures. This was highly informative, as I was able to ask immunology experts more questions about their research or immunology in general, and was also able to gain an immunologist's perspective on strategies for cancer immunotherapy.

In addition, the social events provided an excellent networking opportunity, and I greatly enjoyed meeting the other scientists who were attending the Summer School, and learning more about their research and varied scientific backgrounds.

The careers talks and discussion panels were also very useful, and I gained a lot of valuable and inspiring advice for both academic and non-academic careers. In terms of academic careers, it was enlightening to learn how different Principal Investigators navigated their career paths to become successful group leaders. In terms of non-academic careers, I found the talk by Yvonne Bordon about her role as an editor at Nature Reviews Immunology particularly interesting, as I was able to learn for the first time what such a career entails. If I ever decide to leave academia in the future, working in the journal editing / publishing sector is one of the options I would consider.

Overall, my experience attending the BSI Summer School was extremely positive. I learned a lot in a short space of time, and I am sure that this knowledge will greatly assist me as I continue in my scientific career.

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