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12th Young Investigator's Meeting on Airway Smooth Muscle and Lung Structure-Function (YIM).
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 13th-16th May 2024

The American Thoracic Society Conference (ATS), San Diego, California, USA, 19th-23rd May 2024

In May 2024, I was extremely lucky to be invited to attend two conferences in North America pertaining to my PhD and postdoctoral research in lung fibrosis and asthma. Both conferences offered unique experiences and development opportunities, with YIM consisting of a close-knit group of researchers focusing on specific aspects of lung remodelling and fibrosis, and ATS involving several thousand clinicians, researchers, and corporate representatives focusing on all aspects of lung health.



Giving my presentation. Data included in this talk received good feedback and highlights an exciting potential drug for the treatment of asthma.

At the YIM conference, I had been selected to give a presentation on research I developed during my PhD involving a potential new drug for the treatment of allergic asthma. This was my first international talk and was titled "Chemokine inhibition leads to the abrogation of airway remodelling in a model of allergic asthma without impacting inflammation". The talk was given to around 70 attendees, and I received numerous interesting and thought-provoking questions and comments both immediately after my presentation and whilst networking throughout the conference. Senior scientists in my field encouraged me by suggesting future avenues for my research and pointing out areas which I may want to explore, which was immensely beneficial for my future work. The spirit of collaboration and career development was also strong at this meeting as I made contacts and set up future collaborations with fellow early career researchers from Canada, the US, and even Australia. I really enjoyed the format of the conference, with all talks and

posters presented by early career researchers with senior members giving keynote presentations each day. This allowed the emphasis to be fully on career and research development and fostered a really supportive environment. I also really liked the emphasis on precision cut lung slicing, a technique for measuring lung function, as I am hoping to introduce this technique to my current lab – it's the hot new thing!



YIM 2024 attendees (I'm at the front left). Current and future leaders in airway smooth muscle research.



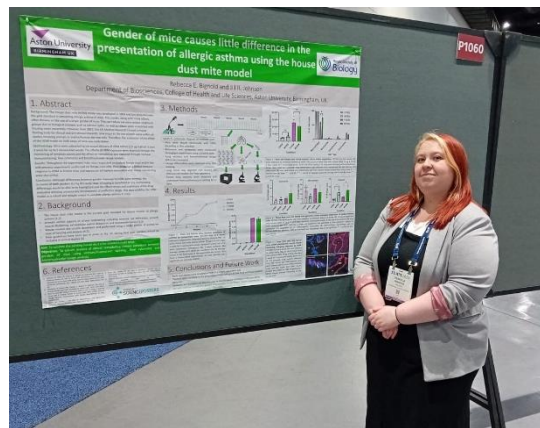
The famous sign, to show you have arrived.

After gaining confidence in Canada, I travelled down to San Diego to attend the ATS conference, the biggest lung conference in the world, with around 14,000 attendees from 94 countries. The scope of this conference was massive, connecting clinicians and researchers to drug companies throughout all aspects of lung science from critical care and paediatrics, to sleep disorders and obstructive pulmonary diseases. This allowed me to network with a wide variety of people, in particular representatives from GSK and even NASA! Here I had the opportunity to present a poster titled “Gender of mice causes little difference in the presentation of allergic asthma using the house dust mite model” highlighting my recent comparison of the presentation of asthma in both male and female mice. Again, I had many fruitful conversations with viewers, having the opportunity to introduce many people to the importance of pericytes, a lesser-known cell type fundamental to my research. The scientific programming was broader than at YIM and I particularly enjoyed seeing the progress being made in simulating lung microenvironments in 3D and new advances in elucidating macrophage communication in asthma. These topics feed into the broader scope of my current project and highlight aspects to consider during drug development in the future.

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My spot in the poster hall. I was visited by many interested researchers and professionals during my session.



Me and my PI atop the DiamondView Tower in downtown San Diego, at the Yale University networking event.

Busy, data-filled days made way to nights filled with networking. Many American universities hosted networking events across the city, both for their own delegates and guests looking to collaborate in the future. Across the duration of the conference, I attended events hosted by Ohio State University, the University of Chicago, and Yale University. It also helped that these events were held in amazing venues, including a rooftop bar overlooking the San Diego Padres baseball diamond and often included free food and drink! At these events, I strengthened bonds forged at YIM (e.g. with researchers from the University of Manitoba and Rutgers University), met with previous international collaborators from the University of Groningen in The Netherlands, and chatted to important people such as an ex-ATS President and current editor of the American Journal of Respiratory Cell and Molecular Biology. These occasions were the capstone of my conference experience, allowing me to confidently talk about my research with influential people, advertising both myself and my research to people who can really make a difference.

Overall, attending these two conferences was an immensely gratifying and emboldening experience. For the first time in my research career, I was able to see myself alongside the movers and shakers of lung science and fully believe that my work can

make a difference in the future. The alliances and friendships I have made will bolster my career in lung



research for many years to come, and I hope that I will have the privilege to attend many more conferences like these in the future. I would like to thank the Royal Society of Biology for funding part of this trip along with SPARK The Midlands, as well as my PI Dr Jill Johnson for accompanying me and introducing me to this wonderful group of people.