

Meeting write-up from Kirk Taylor, Imperial College London

Cardiff 2011 was my first experience of a scientific meeting and of the UK Platelet Group. It was a lively, open and friendly meeting with two full days of talks and posters and, of course, a ~~social~~ networking evening. These meetings were always affordable and, consequently, over-subscribed with several European and international researchers making the journey.

In 2017 the UK Platelet Group and The Platelet Charity joined forces to create The Platelet Society. This society brings together patients, clinicians and researchers to advance the understanding of platelet-related bleeding disorders and thrombosis. The UK Platelet Group was always a champion of early career researchers with the majority of talks and posters presented by them. It was therefore fitting that the first meeting of The Platelet Society was organised by and for early career researchers.

The organising committee arranged a networking evening before the meeting, which allowed researchers to get to know each other in an informal setting. This was a strategy that worked well as the 60+ attendees were fully engaged. I must admit to being sceptical about the meeting format as we were told that there would be no supervisors at the meeting! However, this worked surprisingly well, and all the talks kept to time and there was a good level of discussion, facilitated by our chairs.

Talks covered topics from rare inherited bleeding disorders to the complexities and challenges of image analysis and the need for machine learning. Dr Maria Lopes-Pires highlighted the importance of Zn^{2+} in regulating platelet activation and Stuart Wallis shared exciting data from the first few months of his PhD. We were also left to ponder whether we should be eating more apples and onions or drinking red wine to feel the antithrombotic benefits of quercetin (I know which one I would go for!). The poster sessions provided a terrific opportunity to talk to the researchers and discuss the importance of 'curvy plot analysis' and Pim kinases.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to present my research on the impact of HIV therapy on platelet function. The good news is that antiretroviral therapy is successful and people living with HIV are expected to have 'near-normal' life expectancies. However, we are noticing that people living with HIV have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease and some studies have shown that certain drugs can increase this risk further. Despite more than 100,000 people living with HIV in the UK, only 442 people died from AIDS-related conditions in 2016 (<https://www.avert.org/professionals/hiv-around-world/western-central-europe-north-america/uk>). Late diagnosis and non-adherence to HIV drugs are leading factors in the development of AIDS. This was a good opportunity to talk about stigma around HIV infection and how this can affect HIV testing and adherence to antiretroviral therapy. I discussed the role of the UK Government in running public information videos in 1986 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SqRNUUOk7s>), the role that Princess Diana played in challenging stigma, how activists fought for access to treatment and to be recognised as having HIV/AIDS in the USA and how the advent of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has reduced the spread of HIV and improved the mental health of thousands of at-risk individuals. Andrew Lovell also presented his research on the effect antiretrovirals on platelet function using microplate and *in vivo* approaches.

There was emphasis on career planning and there were opportunities for round-table discussions with career experts, followed by a panel discussion. We were lucky to have experts from a range of backgrounds including sales, administration, government agencies and more traditional academic routes. It was a lively session with Dr Carmen Coxon making a powerful case for working at NIBSC

(National Institute for Biological Standards and Control), a government-funded organisation. Dr Charlotte Murphy talked about her role as a research development manager and how there are different opportunities for promotion outside of the academic career. Selling the academic route were Dr Sarah Jones and Professor David Eisner and they explained how they had got to their positions and how planning and opportunism had played its role. We were also reminded about the numbers game and that if a supervisor has 15 PhD students during their career, that means there are 14 that don't make it in academia...

This was a highly successful meeting and I look forward to the next Platelet Society Meeting in 2019 at Jesus college Cambridge.