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AWARDEE REPORT FORM

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| NAME | | Ciara Walsh | | |
| TWITTER HANDLE\* *optional* | | @CiaraWalsh\_1 | | |
| UNIVERSITY | | University College Dublin | | |
| NAME OF AWARD | | Symington Bequest Fund | | |
| PURPOSE OF AWARD *conference/event attended/organised (full name) with city and dates.* | | | | |
| International Neurotrauma Symposium 2024, Cambridge, 2-5th September 2024 | | | | |
| REPORT: What were your anticipated benefits?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| Attending the International Neurotrauma Symposium (INTS) in Cambridge 2024 has proven to be an immensely valuable experience, significantly contributing to my academic and professional growth. The symposium offered a comprehensive and stimulating environment where I was able to engage with the latest scientific advancements, expand my professional network, and gain insights that are directly applicable to my ongoing spinal cord injury research.  One of the most impactful aspects of the symposium was the exposure to cutting-edge research and emerging trends in neurotrauma. The plenary sessions, featuring renowned experts from across the globe, provided deep insights into emerging research in traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and neuroinflammation. As I am coming towards the end of my PhD and I am am beginning to finalise my thesis and prepare publications, this conference was an excellent opportunity to contextualize my own research within broader interdisciplinary trends.  In addition to the scientific presentations, the poster sessions were highly beneficial. Presenting my own research allowed me to receive invaluable feedback from peers and senior researchers alike. The constructive critiques and discussions during the poster sessions not only helped me refine my research but also opened up possibilities for new collaborations. Engaging with other attendees in this setting facilitated a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities in neurotrauma research, reinforcing the importance of collaboration in advancing the field.  The networking opportunities provided by the symposium were equally rewarding. I had the chance to meet and interact with leading experts and fellow researchers working in neurotrauma. These interactions helped me establish meaningful connections that I believe will lead to future collaborations and mentorship opportunities. I was also able to discuss potential research partnerships and shared interests with colleagues from different institutions, which could lead to collaborative studies and joint publications. Expanding my professional network in this way has been instrumental in broadening my academic horizons and fostering an international perspective on neurotrauma research.  In conclusion, attending the INTS 2024 has provided me with numerous benefits, from gaining cutting-edge knowledge to establishing valuable professional connections. The experience has not only advanced my current research but has also given me the tools and inspiration to continue making meaningful contributions to the neurotrauma field. The insights, skills, and relationships developed during this symposium will have a lasting impact on my career. | | | | |
| COMMENTS: Describe your experience at the conference / lab visit / course / seminar/ event.  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| The conference programme was packed full of relevant sessions featuring leading experts in traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury and neuroinflammation. As a spinal cord injury researcher, I particularly enjoyed attending these sessions and hearing talks from Elizabeth Bradbury (King’s College London, Regenerating the Injured Spinal Cord: from Models & Mechanisms to Translation), Soheila Karimi (University of Manitoba, Novel Targets to optimise the functional outcome of neural stem cell therapies in spinal cord injury), Simon O’Carroll (University of Auckland, The use of gene therapy for spinal cord injury: targeting glia as a therapeutic approach), Pía Vidal (UCSC, Spinal cord injury and the gut microbiota), and David Loane (Trinity College Dublin, Common inflammatory mechanisms in aging, chronic TBI and neurodegeneration).  The plenary session on Sports and Head injury was truly inspiring. As it was a public session, the talks focused less on the scientific aspect of head injury and more on the relatable human stories. We heard from Dawn Astle, whose father Jeff Astle was an English football player who died from Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy due to repetitive head impacts (repetitive headers during his career). George Peasgood is an English Paralympian who suffered a traumatic brain injury during a bike crash two years ago and spoke about his recovery and rehabilitation. Peter Hutchinson is the Chief Medical director of Silverstone Formula One track, and spoke about the safety protocols of F1 racing. Finally, we heard from Simon Kemp on the efforts being made to make rugby a safer sport. This session was extremely engaging, inspiring and was one of the highlights on the conference.  I presented a poster on my PhD research entitled “IL-13 delivery via PLGA microparticle embedded GelMA hydrogel significantly improves functional and histopathological recovery in a mouse contusion spinal cord injury model”. I was honoured to receive second place prize for best poster presentation. This was my first prize at an international conference, and it was particularly meaningful given that I am finishing up my PhD and preparing move on to the next stage of my research career.  The conference was held in the historic city of Cambridge, with multiple venues spread across different colleges in the city centre. It was a wonderful experience to see such historic venues, including the colleges that many important scientists attended, including Stephen Hawking, Watson, Crick & Franklin, and Alan Turing. | | | | |
| REPORT: In relation to skills, what were the most important things you gained? *(does not apply to equipment grant.* For public engagement/outreach awards what did your audience gain and how did you evaluate success?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| Attending the International Neurotrauma Symposium and presenting my poster provided invaluable opportunities to develop and refine several key skills. First and foremost, my communication skills were significantly enhanced. Presenting complex research to an international audience required me to articulate my findings clearly, ensuring that they were accessible to both experts and non-experts in the field. This experience sharpened my ability to condense and convey intricate data effectively, while also improving my confidence in public speaking.  Additionally, my networking skills were strengthened through interactions with global leaders in neurotrauma research. Engaging in discussions with peers and established professionals expanded my ability to initiate meaningful scientific conversations, fostering future collaborations and mentorship opportunities.  The symposium also bolstered my critical thinking skills. By receiving feedback on my poster, I gained new insights into my research methodology and learned to approach my work from different perspectives.  Finally, the experience enhanced my time management and organizational skills. Balancing the demands of preparing for the poster presentation with attending talks and networking events was an exercise in prioritizing tasks and staying focused under pressure. Overall, the symposium was a rich environment for professional growth. | | | | |
| REPORT: How do you think you will put this learning experience into practice in the future? For public engagement/outreach awards how with the materials/knowledge generated by this activity be used in the future?  *Minimum number of words between 200-400. Please write in coherent paragraphs.* | | | | |
| The learning experience gained from attending the International Neurotrauma Symposium will significantly impact my future academic and professional endeavors. First, the improved communication skills I developed by presenting my poster will be critical as I continue to share my research in various settings, such as conferences, seminars, or even publications. The ability to clearly and confidently explain complex findings to diverse audiences will be valuable not only in presenting but also in writing grant applications and collaborating with multidisciplinary teams.  Additionally, the networking experience will continue to shape my approach to building professional relationships. The connections I made with leading researchers in neurotrauma research and related fields may open doors to potential collaborations and mentorships. Moving forward, I plan to nurture these relationships, seeking out opportunities to work on joint research projects and stay informed of the latest advancements in the field, especially given the fact that I aim to begin postdoctoral work in spinal cord injury work next year. This will enable me to contribute to cutting-edge work and continually improve my own research practices.  Moreover, the critical feedback I received during the symposium will guide how I approach the refinement of my research methods and hypothesis formulation. I’ve learned the importance of seeking diverse perspectives to challenge and strengthen my work. This approach will enhance the rigor of my research and lead to more robust findings in the future.  Lastly, the time management and organizational skills I honed will be useful as I balance competing responsibilities in future research projects, ensuring that I can effectively handle multiple tasks while maintaining high standards in my work. | | | | |
| Data Protection/GDPR: I consent to the data included in this submission being collected, processed and stored by the Anatomical Society. Answer YES or NO in the Box below | | | | |
| YES | | | | |
| Graphical Images: If you include graphical images you must obtain consent from people appearing in any photos and confirm that you have consent. A consent statement from you must accompany each report if relevant. A short narrative should accompany the image. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below | | | | |
| N/A | | | | |
| Copyright: If you submit images you must either own the copyright to the image or have gained the explicit permission of the copyright holder for the image to be submitted as part of the report for upload to the Society’s website, Newsletter, social media and so forth. A copyright statement must accompany each report if relevant. Answer N/A not applicable, YES or NO in the box below | | | | |
| N/A | | | | |
| SIGNATURE | Ciara Walsh | | DATE | 23/09/2024 |

*If submitted electronically, a type-written name is acceptable in place of a hand-written signature*

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