

Gender Equality and Career Development (GECD) Committee Report Submitted to the IUIS Council at ICI2013, Milan, Italy

Olivera J. Finn, Chair
Narinder Mehra, Co-Chair

GECD Committee was established at the 2010 IUIS Council meeting in Kobe, Japan. The mission of the Committee is to encourage promotion of women immunologists around the world and to help with career development issues of women and young scientists. We monitor various activities around the world of organizations devoted to these topics and publicize those that are important to our mission. The Committee encourages and offers assistance to IUIS member societies to undertake activities that promote gender equality. The Committee compiles and maintains current a list of outstanding women immunologists around the world, both young and established scientists, to aid organizers of important international meetings in selecting women speakers and assuring their proper representation. The Committee supports attendance of women trainees at various courses, in collaboration with other IUIS Committees, in particular the Education Committee. The Committee organizes various educational and networking activities for women and trainees in association with IUIS member societies and Federations during their meetings and congresses.

Committee Members

Olivera J. Finn, Committee Chair
Narinder Mehra, Committee Co-Chair
Franca Ronchese, Member
Anna Erdel, Member
Jeffrey Frelinger, Member
Rudolf Valenta, Member
Xuetao Cao, Member

Committee Activities 2012/2013

Sponsorship of Attendance at Courses Important to Career Development:

This activity is carried out in collaboration with the Education Committee. Dr. Michelle Letarte, Chair, and members of the Education Committee, which includes Dr. Finn and Dr. Mehra, select the most qualified applicants to attend the course and then one of them, usually a deserving woman on the verge of taking a leadership role in her group or institution, is selected to be sponsored by GECD. In July 2012, GECD sponsored the attendance of Dr. Caroline Amolo Ogwang, Research Medical Officer at KEMRI Wellcome Trust Research Programme, Kenya, to attend the week-long AAI Introductory Course in Philadelphia. In her report, Dr. Ogwang states *"I am a research medical officer at our Clinical Trials Facility and part of my work involves safety and reactogenicity*

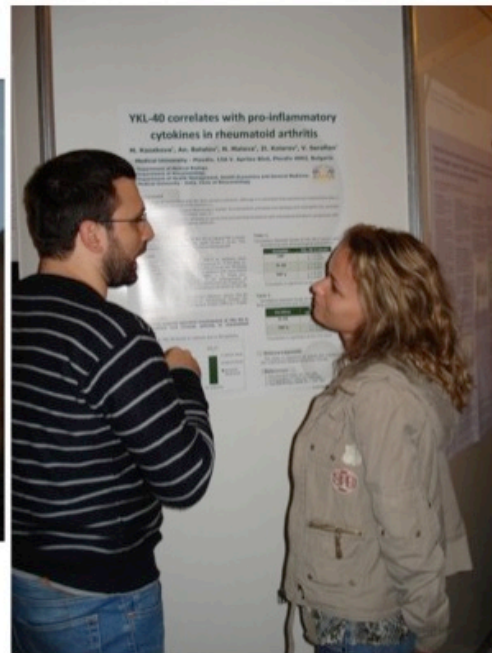
assessment of vaccines under trial. I also have an interest in infectious disease and vaccinology. I am currently an investigator in a phase IIb malaria vaccine trial that uses a heterologous prime boost vaccination approach with two viral – vectored candidate malaria vaccines. Understanding how vaccines work, the factors that predispose one to infection as well as how various pathogens interact with our bodies to cause illness is important in my line of work.” In terms of what this opportunity has meant for her careere development, she states: “I can now with confidence explain to anyone how various vaccines interact with the body to prevent disease, the innate and adaptive immune system, the different types of vaccines, factors that predispose one to illness by various pathogens and the mechanism by which various pathogens evade the immune system amongst other things. This is important when training the staff that I oversee on how the vaccines we use/ under trial work as well, in the sensitization of potential clinical trial participants and when I make presentations on our vaccine trials in scientific meetings. I also built on some earlier immunological concepts that weren’t clear to me e.g. autoimmunity and solid organ transplantation and learnt totally new things like genetic approaches to immune – mediated disease.”



IUIS sponsored participants at the 2012 AAI Introductory Course in Immunology in Philadelphia with Michele Hogan (second from left), AAI Executive Director. First on the right is Caroline Amolo Ogwang, sponsored by the IUIS Gender Equality and Career Development Committee. The other two participants are Armen Sanosyan and Fatoumatta Darboe, sponsored by the IUIS Education Committee.

GECD also sponsored two Assistant Professors of Immunology from the Medical University on Plovdiv, Bugaria, Dr. Maria Kazakova and Dr. Yana Feodorova, to attend the Ceppellini Advanced School of Immunology in Sorrento (Naples), Italy

in November 2012. Dr. Kazakova had recently obtained her PhD and Dr. Feodorova has just started research towards her PhD. In her report, Dr. Kazakova states *“This school had a broad spectrum of scientific lectures covering the innate immunity such as: The complement system: a new life for an old system, Gamma delta T cell biology and their use in therapy, Innate immunity and toll-like receptors and etc. I had opportunity to meet other PhD students - a wide international range of participants - and experts from around the world and start to build my professional connections. I hope I was able to contribute something in my teaching and research work.”* The report of Dr. Feodorova also states: *“For three days I listened to lectures by renowned specialists in the field and for me being given the chance to sit there was an honor. I was really absorbed in science!”*



How this course benefitted these two young scientists was illustrated by a special note of appreciation by their head of department and Provost who wrote:

Dear Prof. Finn,

As head of department and scientific supervisor of Maria Kazakova and Yana Feodorova – grant holders of EFIS-EJI Course on Innate Immunity 2012 in Sorrento, 31 October - 4 November 2012, I would like to express my appreciation of your decision to support both young scientists to attend this important for their career course.

My gratitude goes to to the Gender Equality and Career Development (GECD) of the Ceppellini School, to the Committee of the International Union of Immunology

Societies (IUIS) and to the organizers of the course.

Wishing you success and satisfaction in your work.

Best regards,

Victoria Sarafian, MD, PhD, DMSci
*Vice Rector for Research
Professor of Immunology
Department of Biology
Medical University-Plovdiv*

In February 2013, GECD co-sponsored Jelena Cvetkovic, Research Assistant, PhD student, Department for Immunology and Immunoparasitology Institute for the Application of Nuclear Energy - INEP Belgrade, Serbia, to attend the 2013 FOCIS Advanced Course in Basic & Clinical Immunology in Scottsdale, AZ, USA. In her report, Jelena states: *“it was a great opportunity for me to hear about the latest advancements and discoveries in immunology as well as to expand my knowledge in this field. The lectures have been very interesting and the special atmosphere of the course itself has given me the possibility to effectively communicate with other participants in the group on a personal and scientific level. I have brought back my unforgettable impressions of this course. It has been a great pleasure for me to meet prominent speakers as well as many young immunologists from different countries. Therefore, I think and do hope that this course would be very good for my future research career.”*



We have already selected two young women immunologists to attend the 2013 AAI courses. Dr. Deshinta Putri Mulya from Yogyakarta, Indonesia for the AAI Introductory course and Dr. Rashmi Tipplagama from Sri Lanka for the AAI Advanced Course. Their travel will be covered from the 2013-2014 budget.

Career Development Networking Events and Symposia:

It is a goal of the GECD Committee to organize these events at all the IUIS Federations meetings, or other international conferences that include a large number of trainees and/or take place in countries that have not traditionally supported career development of women.

GECD Symposium at ALAI 2012, Lima Peru. During the 10th Latin-American Congress of Immunology held in Lima (May 23-26, 2012), an hour and a half long luncheon session for discussing issues related to gender equality and career development was organized on May 30. It was attended by 50-60 participants, both young men and women from various countries in the region. Narinder Mehra, Co-chair of the GECD Committee, gave a power-point presentation highlighting the important issues to be discussed and to be addressed in the future through various GECD activities. This was followed by a brief presentation by Catherine Friedman (France) and an open house discussion with the audience. The participants included Anna Erdle (Hungary), Michelle Letarte (Canada), Catherine Friedman (France), Clelia Maria Riera (Argentina) and Narinder Mehra (India). There was healthy discussions and several good queries and suggestions from the house: i) Write to member societies and ascertain their views as to what are they doing to promote gender equality in their activities; ii) request from congress organizers (ICI 2013, 2016) to help women delegates with baby sitting facilities; iii) Encourage video recording of specific presentations made by women scientists in international forums to be hosted on the GECD website as a means of encouragement.

GECD Symposium on Career Choices and Networking Breakfast at FAIS 2012. GECD co-sponsored the Career Choices Symposium with FAIS in December 2012 that attracted both young men and women scientists and also organized a Networking Breakfast where established women scientists conveyed their stories, successes as well as barriers to success, to young women scientists beginning their careers. There was an informal exchange of personal experiences and useful advice on what it takes under many different social and geographic circumstances to have a fulfilling professional and personal life. The most useful part of this meeting, as indicated by the participants, was that junior women scientists currently struggling with these issues got to meet their senior colleagues who have successfully handled them. In other words, they could see that this was possible. In addition, women were made aware of several ongoing IUIS activities, especially of the IUIS Education Committee, which they were advised to follow closely on the IUIS website for career development

opportunities. The breakfast was organized and led by Dr. JoAnne Flynn, Professor at the University of Pittsburgh, who was an invited speaker at the conference, on behalf of Drs. Finn and Narinder who were not attending the meeting.



Other activities. Because GECD is a relatively new IUIS committee and still developing its plan of action, the participants at the various events are asked for suggestions on what the committee could do, considering its financial limitations, to assist them in their efforts. Some suggestions were: 1) to develop the GECD web site into a resource page with direct links to international organizations that aid women in their professional development; 2) to create a list of established women scientists who would be willing mentors for junior women; 3) to maintain as much as possible person-to-person contacts that get established during organized meetings such as this one; 4) to organize these gatherings as often as possible. GECD is working on all these suggestions.

One of the activities we currently discussing but will be supported through the 2013-2014 budget, is a website to be hosted by Australoasian Society of Immunology (ASI) with the assignment to search out important sources of information and opportunities and populate the GECD webpage on the IUIS website. The person who will be in charge is Dr. Roslyn Kemp, Lecturer in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Otago in

Dunedin, NZ. The website will be launched at the annual ASI meeting in Wellington, NZ, at the ASI Women's Initiative meeting. Dr. Finn is one of the keynote speakers at the meeting and will be there to introduce the website and speak about the GEDC participation and sponsorship of this activity.

Promotion of Women Immunologists:

One of the GECD Committee's goals is to assure that women immunologists are well represented at international immunology meetings. We worked with the presidents of all IUIS societies to compile a list of accomplished women immunologists that was forwarded to the ICI2013 Organizing Committee to help them select women session chairs and speakers in various plenary session, symposia and other venues at the congress.