



I would like to start off by thanking you for granting my application for the European Respiratory Society (ERS) travel fellowship. The grant significantly eased the financial pressures of attending the ERS congress which meant I could focus on preparing for my oral presentation.

The congress provided the opportunity to learn about the latest cutting-edge research and update my experimental approach. I was particularly interested in the symposium on the use of organoids and pluripotent stem cells in disease modelling. It was a great start to the congress as the techniques learnt, and research insight gleaned from this symposium has informed the direction of my PhD project. Due to the lack of animal models that significantly recapitulate human IPF, there is significant research in the field being carried out using patient-derived cells and in some cases, organs. The next stage of my project is going to explore the efficacy of a small molecular compound in attenuating IPF-related changes. After the symposium it was clear which organoid system would be most relevant and highlighted labs where this technical expertise could be gained.

A crucial part of attending the congress was the opportunity to learn from multidisciplinary researchers at the forefront of the field. The industry-led sessions were usually presented by clinicians which gave me a glimpse into the clinical world by introducing aspects of the field I would not usually encounter. These included patient, drug and disease management and the importance of 'real-world' trials. Results from several clinical trials and real-world trials were presented which summarised efficacy of approved drugs and highlighted the important unmet clinical needs such as untreated comorbidities. Since IPF is a disease related to ageing, majority of patients suffer from various diseases. A common IPF comorbidity is pulmonary hypertension, data presented from the latest clinical trial which involved combination therapy for both implications were promising but results were not statistically significant. Although no drug can be a 'cure-all', the importance of developing a drug that targets multiple diseases will be extremely beneficial in improving IPF patient outcome. This has impacted the direction of my project as the drug target I am currently researching has been implicated in animal models of inflammatory lung diseases and pulmonary hypertension which are common diseases affecting IPF patients thus represents a promising prospect.

Prior to the conference, I was aware of the significance of networking, but I did not fully appreciate its importance. At the congress, I was given several opportunities to present my work to current collaborators, potential collaborators and investors. Furthermore, poster discussion sessions provided a unique environment to meet researchers with diverse interests, engage with their work and understand the potential impact it may have in furthering the respiratory field.

I have come away from the congress not only with a great deal of scientific knowledge but also renewed passion for IPF research. I have a greater appreciation of how my research fits into the bigger picture, how it will advance knowledge on the disease and its relation to the current clinical needs.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

Kasope Wolffs