

ESF RESEARCH CONFERENCES

Rapporteur Report

Partnership:	ESF-EMBO Symposium
Conference Title:	Molecular Biology and Innovative Therapies in Sarcomas of Childhood and Adolescence
Dates:	29 September - 4 October 2012
Chair:	Professor Beat Schäfer, University Children's Hospital, CH
Rapporteur:	Dr. Charles Keller, Oregon Health & Science University, US

General Comments

Any general comments you might have concerning the conference, your role, the scientific area covered by this conference, etc.

This conference on the sarcomas of childhood and adolescence was unique as being the first such international conference in more than a decade. The conference was notable because it was so well attended by experts in the field. The diseases were restricted primarily to Ewing's sarcoma and rhabdomyosarcoma, which gave the opportunity to go into depth on these two diseases over the period of the conference. For similar future conferences, Osteosarcoma and Undifferentiated Pleomorphic Sarcoma might be considered as topics. My own role was to discuss animal models, particularly conditional transgenic models, and to a lesser extent to discuss therapeutic targets and preclinical therapeutics. Other areas covered, equally or more valuable, were clinical research, transcriptional control/epigenetics, novel (critical) signalling pathways, fusion proteins as therapeutic targets, targeting signal transduction, resistance mechanisms & cancer stem cells, immunotherapy, cell death pathways, and new drugs/preclinical & clinical evaluation. Integration of speakers/topics such as biochemistry and developmental biology were touched upon, and these were well received (developmental biology aspects, particularly). Thus, the program encompassed a rich program.

Quality of Scientific Programme, Presentations and Discussion

Comments on the balance and scope of the scientific programme, the scientific quality of the presentations and discussions.

The balance/scope above was very favourable. Because the disease interests were limited, even having a range of topics (as mentioned above) led to a great deal of complementation from presentations from the first day to the last. The quality was almost uniformly very high, for which the organizer should be commended. Particularly well chosen were the short (20 minute) talks by the younger investigators. Discussions were energized yet congenial throughout the conference.

Informal Networking and Exchange; Atmosphere

Was the schedule and the atmosphere conducive to an easy exchange of information? Was there time and space for an informal discussion? Were younger researchers integrated?

Balance of Participants

Was there an appropriate balance between young and senior participants? Was a balance of national groups and researchers from different (sub)fields achieved?

The cloistered setting over several days led to not only interactions between young and senior faculty, but frequently 1-2 follow-up conversations. The nationalities were varied, and a diversity were represented. Cross-disciplinary collaborations appeared to be established on almost an hourly basis. The poster session was particularly successful setting for in depth discussions and the establishment of cross-disciplinary conversations.

Outlook and Future Developments

Will new collaborations emerge from this conference? (How) could the conference outcomes be utilized further? Are there suitable (ESF) programmes or instruments to further the work of the conference?

Collaborations were frequently established among participants. My personal list has 5-6 active projects I am strongly interested to ensure are seen through. The relationships built for the sarcoma committee at this conference (the first such international conference in 10 years) might be perpetuated by coordinated communication about resources (cell

lines, animal models, etc) via a website or blog – particularly if a community (patient) advocacy group were to keep members of this community in ongoing communication. A similar conference in 3 years focused on related cancers would be advantageous for perpetuation the success and culture of open communication fostered at this recent ESF-EMBO conference.

Follow-up

What immediate and long term follow-up would benefit collaborations and dialogues that may have begun at the conference?

As stated above, we have recently discovered from each other the advantages and limitations of cell line models as well as animal models. For collaborations, a “seed grant” program (of not very much money) could be offered to participants who write a proposal of collaboration across groups (in different countries), with a travel award to another EMBO-ESF conference if the collaboration results are published and/or later funded as a grant.

Organisation and Infrastructure

Were venue, catering and accommodation appropriate for this conference? Were participants satisfied with the on-site administration and support?

The venue was hosting staff were more than sufficient. Compared with some settings, the host city was less distracting. Perhaps that is a reason such good conversations were had and collaborations were initiated.

Summary & Overall Assessment

Was the conference successful; were its aims achieved?

The EMBO-ESF Symposium on Molecular Biology and Innovative Therapies in Sarcomas of Childhood and Adolescence was extraordinary. Aspects that account for its success were the focus on a limited set of disease areas, which allowed scientific subtopics to be explored at depth. The organizer, Professor Beat Schäfer (University Children's Hospital, CH) is a particularly open and industrious collaboration, which set the tone for the conference and led to numerous scientific interchanges between researchers of diverse geographical origins and complementary expertises. As a result, numerous collaborations were established that link established and young investigators. Furthermore, this community has expressed the desire for ongoing, regular interactions together at future conferences, whether for similar conferences or attending (as a group) meetings of other disciplines (eg, a large contingent of EMBO-ESF researchers now plans to attend together a muscle and sclerotome developmental biology conference).

About ESF Research Conferences

The Scheme

This conference is part of the European Science Foundation's (ESF) Research Conferences Scheme. The Scheme aims to promote scientific excellence and frontier level research throughout Europe and the rest of the world. Conferences aim to provide leading scientists and other participants, including young researchers, with a platform to present their work, to discuss the most recent developments in their fields of research and to network.

Conference Format

The core activities should be based on lectures by invited speakers, who are leaders in their respective fields, followed by extensive discussion periods. An informal exchange of ideas, both inside and outside the lecture room, should be encouraged, and the number of sessions in the daily timetable should be limited in order to allow sufficient time for interaction between the participants. Time should be reserved for a 'Forward Look Plenary Discussion' about future developments in the field.

Participants can take all their meals together to encourage further contact and networking, which can be particularly beneficial to younger researchers who may be less outspoken in the formal lecture room setting. In order to gain optimum benefit from the conference, both the speakers and the participants are asked to stay for the whole duration.

Division of Tasks

The Conference Chair is responsible for ensuring the quality of the scientific programme through the selection and invitation of speakers, and through the selection of participants.

The ESF Conferences Unit is responsible for managing all the logistical aspects of the conference organisation, including the provision of an on-site secretariat.

Further information: www.esf.org/conferences