

TRAINING BURSARY PROGRAMME REPORT (2021)

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Training bursary program destination: Pfizer-University of Granada-Junta de Andalucía Centre for Genomics and Oncological Research (GENYO), Granada, Spain

1) What was the motivation to apply for training in this Centre?

I am a postdoctoral researcher in molecular biology field. During my PhD research, I had excelled in many techniques however I did not have any opportunity to experience on bioinformatics. In today's technology, high-throughput sequencing protocols are commonly used in many projects. Better understanding of analysis of sequencing data is a powerful tool to apply on my research interests. During this training, I had worked with SLE patient data to understand molecular basis of the disease in more detailed way. Learning basics of RNA sequencing data analysis is a great leverage for my proceeding research.

Moreover, I was introduced to great scientific environment in Genyo, Granada. Connecting with these powerful scientists empowers me for future collaborations. Their expertise was something missing in my institute and my main aim was to transfer this experience to my home institute. Learning a new skill set was my primary motivation to apply to SLEuro Training Programme. My second motivation was to work with scientists who have different research interests than my institute. With this Program, I learnt new tools as well as I had time to discuss scientific advancements with scientist that have fresh perspectives.

After learning many things about SLE, I decided to change my field of work into immunology and now, I started to work in a new laboratory that focuses on autoinflammatory diseases. Since this training played such a big influence on my career, I am very grateful for my acceptance into this program.

2) How the objectives were fulfilled by the training?

My training was held in Genyo, Granada, Spain in Marta Alarcon-Riquelme's lab. Her lab has an expertise on many autoinflammatory diseases in particular SLE. A few researchers in her lab were very experienced bioinformaticians and I worked exclusively with Guillermo Barturen who has published great studies in Marta's lab. My primary objective was to learn basics of bioinformatics and be able to apply it on RNA sequencing data analysis. Within this two-month long training, I had learnt how to work in Command Line and R to be able to understand the basics of bioinformatics analysis. I had also time to analyze 100s of SLE patient data and visualize it via new tools that I have learnt during this training.

3) What are the main opportunities / strengths this center offers for future applicants?

Marta Alarcon-Riquelme's lab has expertise on SLE and they have a dynamic team who work in molecular biology and bioinformatics aspects of SLE among many other autoinflammatory diseases. The lab has great opportunities to gain experience in research techniques as well as bioinformatic tools. Their weekly meetings were also very valuable to understand other projects that are held in the lab. Attending their journal club meetings was refreshing and helpful to dissect the newly published work in SLE field. If someone is interested in gaining more experience in research techniques, Marta's lab is an invaluable place to have this training.

Other than research aspects, Granada is a very nice place to spend two months. Living costs are reasonably affordable with the training support.

4) Practical advice for future applicants to the SLEuro training bursary

I definitely recommend this training program to MDs and PhDs who wants to immerse into new field or to gain experience on a particular topic aligning with the host lab's expertise. I think great strength comes with the good match. My aim was to learn bioinformatic techniques so that I chose Marta's Lab since they have the expertise. And, I am very grateful that they have welcomed me and gave me a wonderful training with investing a lot of time.

I highly recommend to all applicants to contact with the host institute to check if their motivation to apply for a particular center is reasonable. Also, learning your home institute's approach on supporting such trainings beforehand is a time saver.

One last tip is to learn basics of host institute's native language even before starting to your training. It is so fun! I have learnt many Spanish words during my stay and this is a bonus of my training.

I had amazing experience with this training and I highly recommend this opportunity for fellow researchers.