

## **TRAINING BURSARY PROGRAMME REPORT (2021)**

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Training bursary program destination: Uppsala University Hospital, Rheumatology Clinic, SLE-Centre

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

I have decided to apply for this eight-week programme with the main purpose to improve my current medical knowledge and sharpen my clinical and research skills. I am in my last year of residency, so I considered it as a tremendous chance to have a real up-to-date notion of the main rheumatic inflammatory diseases, especially related to SLE field, by learning directly from outstanding experts in a renowned European SLE-Centre.

Uppsala University Hospital seemed to me the ideal place to accomplish my goals, as it is a centre with a recognized expertise in the interferon system and its role in the etiopathogenesis of SLE, with a strong focus on the genetic background, as well as the molecular and clinical consequences of risk genes. Being in the heart of such a prestigious scientific environment would give me the perfect context to explore fresh perspectives on lupus care and research, expand my academic network and get in touch with another healthcare system.

### **2) How the objectives were fulfilled by the training?**

My experience at Uppsala University Hospital has exceeded all of my expectations, because this programme provided me with numerous resources, field connections, gave me awareness of my weaknesses and ideas to work on an action plan on how to overcome them.

The training was carried out under the supervision of Professor Lars Rönnblom, who welcomed me in the warmest way and integrated me from the first day into the team and into the activities of the department. During my stay I had the chance to be involved in both clinical practice and research activities.

The clinical part conducted at the Department of Rheumatology was very dynamic and allowed me to participate in diverse activities such as: engaging the specialized outpatient SLE-clinic, attending rounds at the medical ward, journal clubs or difficult cases sessions. A big plus was the fact that although SLE was my primary focus, I also had the chance to see and discuss very challenging cases of patients with other pathologies than lupus (myositis, vasculitis, spondyloarthritis, Behcet's disease, Sjögren's syndrome). Clinical activity was the opportunity for me to connect with another organizational model, different from what I was used to, understand its challenges and exchange ideas with my colleagues.

My research activity was performed at Rudbeck Laboratory, under the supervision of Dag Leonard, who involved me in a project about the development of a polygenic risk score for nephritis in lupus patients. My research project was extremely exciting and allowed me to

acquire new knowledge about research techniques, gene expression and SNPs analysis. My great lab partners – Ahmed Sayadi and Sarah Reid were very kind and dedicated the time I needed in order to understand the project's approach. Lab work was also supplemented with seminars about immunological aspects of autoimmune rare diseases, presented by distinguished lecturers. Dedicating this time in the lab with my colleagues showed me how essential is to rigorously read a scientific paper and how doctors should extend the immunology concepts born in lab to high quality experiments and consequently, to daily clinical activities.

Professor Lars Rönnblom was a real mentor for me and always encouraged my participation in academic conferences related to SLE such as Lupus Network Meeting, hosted in Vadstena, with the entire Scandinavian scientific community. I also attended Department of Medical Sciences Day Conference, which gathered around the table specialists from different areas. Being part of these events allowed me to broaden my understanding on genetics, immunology of patients with SLE and was a truly enlightening experience that gave me a new perspective on the realities of science.

### **3) What are the main opportunities / strengths this centre offers for future applicants?**

Uppsala University Hospital is one of the largest hospitals in Sweden. The Section of Rheumatology has a specialized SLE clinic, with a vast cohort of patients and high clinical and scientific expertise. Professor Lars Rönnblom is head of the centre and also coordinator of the Swedish SLE network, which encompasses clinicians and scientists from all university clinics in Sweden. To summarize, the major advantages of this centre are:

- the vast experience in treating SLE patients and exposure to complex cases;
- the opportunity to attend other connective tissue diseases outpatient clinics;
- tight collaboration with other Swedish and international centres;
- high-level academic environment and access to the very latest research findings;
- friendly climate to work in - here I found a very welcoming, kind team always willing to teach you;
- experience the vibrant Swedish culture;
- learn how to open your mind, be more creative, ask more questions.

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

Applying for this programme is undoubtedly a rewarding experience from a professional perspective, as well as from a personal growth point of view. Start by checking on each SLE centre's website before applying, as it has rich information regarding ongoing research projects and department's daily activities. A best practice would be to inform your future potential coordinator about your intention to apply. Prepare in advance your paperwork related to your application. I would also advise future applicants to be open-minded and keep a positive attitude to everything that is new.

I feel honoured and thankful for having the privilege of coming to Uppsala where I gained more than I had ever expected. Training Bursary Programme is a unique experience for any young rheumatologist, eager to be in touch with the latest medical breakthroughs.

I am so grateful for getting this chance and many thanks to the entire team, everyone was so unbelievably friendly – Dag, Ahmed, Sarah, Maija, Neha, Johanna, Juliana, Christian, Gunnel, Karin, Ann, Agnes and of course, special thanks to Professor Rönnblom - a dedicated and inspiring mentor. I was really lucky to be part of your brilliant team! Last, but not least,



thank you SLEuro for the financial aid that makes possible this type of projects for all the candidates.

PS: Don't forget to make some time to enjoy charming Uppsala and Stockholm and chase the Northern lights, if you come in cold season!