

TRAINING BURSARY PROGRAMME REPORT (2021)

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Training bursary program destination: CHUC Lupus Clinic, Coimbra, Portugal

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

I was really inspired by the various works from the CHUC Rheumatology department, especially the SLE-DAS score that gives a meaningful disease activity and follow up tool. When I saw Prof Luis Ines as a mentor for this training bursary program, my hopes got fueled up and hence, I requested Prof Luis for the letter of acceptance. He was extremely kind in his gesture and helped me through the process.

SLE has many disease activity assessment tools, but none give a quantitative value to the actual disease activity at a given time point. SLE-DAS incorporates every possible clinical feature in SLE and compounds same into a meaningful score. It helps the clinician not only to grade activity into remission, low, moderate or high but also know the trend to predict impending flare and plan management accordingly. I had the interest to know more about this tool and its day to day clinical application and what could have been the best place to learn same than this.

2) How were the objectives fulfilled by the training?

My primary objectives for this bursary training were to know how expert centers follow up their SLE cases, their treatment tapering protocols and thresholds for changing therapy. I also wanted to know their approach in pre-clinical lupus patients and inter-departmental holistic management of SLE patients.

My objectives were completely fulfilled by this training as this center has experience of more than 450 active follow up of SLE patients, with cases being followed up from 1980s till date. They have an excellent data capturing protocol and hence, disease flares, treatment modifications and activity status can be analyzed effectively at any time point. It was motivating to see that majority of their patients were in remission or low disease state, off corticosteroids. Prof Luis gave me new insights into use of belimumab, anifrolumab, rituximab etc in managing challenging cases.

I was impressed, as well, by the pre-clinical cases and undifferentiated cases which I saw during these training days. Their follow ups, management protocols and open discussion with experts at this center has inspired me to incorporate few modifications into my practice.

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

This center has a lot of positive opportunities / strengths which I would enumerate as below :-

- a) Their experience in managing all manifestations of SLE, including very rare ones like shrinking lung syndrome is amazing.
- b) They have long term (> 30-40 years) follow up data of these patients which not only gives clinical information but also inspires that with proper clinician- patient interaction, SLE patients can have a near normal life.
- c) Apart from SLE, this center is well equipped to manage all rheumatic diseases. I had opportunity to attend general rheumatology clinics as well, where I improvised myself in managing psoriatic arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis, osteoporosis and other day to day rheumatic patients .
- d) I also grabbed the opportunity to learn few skills/ hacks in musculoskeletal ultrasound and nail fold capillaroscopy.
- e) Weakly academic sessions, journal clubs, case presentations with the entire department was not only nostalgic but also a knowledge treat.
- f) Hospitality, benevolence and warmth which the entire department showered on me, made the 8 weeks period too short
- g) Last but not the least, Portugal and Portuguese experience is altogether a different feeling. The historical avenues, delicacies, natural landscaping and above all, the people themselves, will cast an ever lasting impression

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

For the future applicants, I would advise that this training, at any given center, is a lifetime opportunity to learn from experts, their experience can sharpen our skills as well as our clinical management protocols. It will be good enough, to have some basic idea about the local language, as it will help to interact directly with patients, which I missed, however, Prof Luis was very kind and accommodating for same and did not let me lose any clinical information. Applicants can as well plan a project ahead with their mentors and carry out same during their training days. This training will help us widen our vision, gain an experience at an expert center and foster future collaborations.