

TRAINING BURSARY PROGRAMME REPORT (2023)

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Training bursary program destination: Cliniques Universitaires Saint-Luc, Bruxelles

1) What was the motivation to apply for your training in this Centre? / Main objectives

In my research group, our research interest includes but is not limited to investigating clinical determinants and immune mechanisms that are coupled with treatment response or non-response, remission and low disease activity, renal flares, and neuropsychiatric flares in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Within the group, I have been assigned the role of research coordinator for the randomised clinical study “Per-protocol repeat kidney biopsy in incident cases of lupus nephritis (ReBioLup)”, which aims to address the question of the added value of a per-protocol repeat kidney biopsy at one year from baseline in terms of short-term (attainment of complete renal response) and long-term (preservation of renal function) outcomes. As a young physician who is interested in following a career in research, I am convinced that a Training Bursary from the SLEuro would be a great opportunity for improving my clinical expertise, it would contribute to the development of my research career within the field of SLE, and it would help initiate future scientific collaborations. To achieve this, the suggested clinical and research objectives of an SLEuro Training Programme, to be preferably conducted at the Cliniques Universitaires Saint-Luc, Department of Rheumatology, UCLouvain are outlined below.

- I. Clinical objectives: The Department of Rheumatology, UCLouvain is known for its well-established and long-standing expertise in treating patients with different systemic autoimmune rheumatic diseases, and Prof. Frédéric Houssiau is widely known and acknowledged for his significant contributions in the field of lupus nephritis. Hence, the clinical objectives of my fellowship would be to attend different parts of the Department of Rheumatology i.e., the outpatient clinic including the dedicated lupus nephritis clinic, as well as participate in clinical meetings and case discussions to gain a broader perspective of the clinical care of patients with rheumatic diseases, especially SLE.
- II. Research objectives: UCLouvain is one of the coordinating centres for ReBioLup and given that I am involved in the project, I believe having the chance of working under the supervision of Prof. Frédéric Houssiau would have a significant contribution to my overall comprehension of the objectives of the project and facilitate the conduct of planned proof-of-concept studies that have been designed to inform future analyses within ReBioLup.

2) How were the objectives fulfilled by the training? / Description of activities

My activities included following:

- Regular attendance at the outpatient clinic, where I had the chance to closely follow cases and the management.
- Search of medical charts to collect histopathological and clinical data for the research project that is conducted from scratch during my internship.
- Discussing about the histopathological data retrospectively received from the charts with the histopathologist at the center for the optimal evaluation/documentation of the data.
- Building analysis-ready dataset and performing a variety of analysis on this dataset under supervision.
- Having regular meetings to discuss research project with Prof. Frédéric Houssiau and Prof. Farah Tamirou.
- Interpreting and reporting results in scientific way of writing which is submitted/accepted for oral presentation by now to one of the highly prestigious European lupus conferences – 14th European LUPUS Meeting, Bruges, Belgium.

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

Given the well-established outpatient clinic and the expertise of Prof. Frédéric Houssiau and his team, I believe it was a great opportunity to gain a clinical perspective of clinical care of patients with rheumatic diseases. Prof. Frédéric Houssiau is well-known for his contributions in research especially on lupus nephritis, and having the chance of initiating a research project under his supervision was truly a great pleasure of mine.

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

The applicants should be prepared for an intense and extremely interesting outpatient experience, I still cannot believe how much I learnt in such a short period of time – 2 months! You will realize the ongoing research projects are dynamically being influenced by the cases they have at the clinic. There is a friendly and encouraging environment for thinking and discussing. Last but not least, they have had built an excellent database – a true treasure! Leveraging this resource opens doors to exploring diverse research goals!