

Carol De Santis - 15th International Congress of Toxicology, July 2019, Honolulu, Hawaii USA

I was delighted and honoured to be awarded a travel bursary by the BTS to attend the International Congress of Toxicology (ICT) in Hawaii in July 2019. This is probably the most prestigious toxicology meeting (obviously second to the BTS congress!) and provided an excellent platform for me to learn from and network with toxicologists and scientists on a global scale. The fact this triennial meeting organised by the International Union of Toxicology (IUTOX) was co-hosted by the Society of Toxicology (SOT) was an excellent opportunity for me as a PhD student, with the location of Honolulu an added bonus. Furthermore, the theme of “Toxicology Solutions for Global Public, Environmental, and Personal Health” provided a further important and all encompassing dimension to the meeting, emphasising particularly those from developing countries where toxicology is still underrepresented.

The meeting addressed a wide diversity of topics (too many to describe here), but one area that stood out for me and one where a lot of special attention is currently being focused on a global scale was the promotion and implementation of alternatives to the use of animals in toxicological research and safety testing. This sub-theme of the meeting involved a number of speakers and presenters from all aspects of the field, a number of different institutions, and perspectives from different regulatory authorities and countries, highlighting new methodologies and viewpoints. For me personally, the various sessions, seminars and poster presentations on refinement and alternatives to animal testing were very engaging and especially relevant to my research.

A major highlight for me was the keynote lecture presented by Professor Maurice Whelan, head of the Chemical Safety and Alternative Methods Unit of the Directorate for Health, Consumers and Reference Materials of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) in Ispra, Italy. Prof Whelan's presentation highlighted the status of the EU and its relevant agencies in relation to the development and inclusion of alternative test methods for regulatory use in human safety assessments. As my research is focused on the validation of *in vitro* methodologies for the assessment of cardiac drug safety, this lecture was particularly pertinent as it allowed me to contextualise my results and define their applicability within industrial and regulatory settings. I took the opportunity to introduce myself and my work to Prof Whelan, and many other prominent experts in the area: discussing my data and ideas with these high profile toxicologists greatly helped my confidence as an early-career scientist.

In conclusion, having the opportunity to attend the ICT was excellent for me as a PhD student, provided me with several new ideas and perspectives for my research and career going forward. Consequently, I would like to thank the BTS for the financial support which enabled me to attend this event and gain a wider appreciation of toxicology and shape my future career and research aspirations.