

I was fortunate to win the Santander Travel Award to attend the 2017 MDA Scientific Conference on neuromuscular diseases. The conference was organised by Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) in Washington DC, USA from March 19 to March 22, 2017.

I was an MSc by Research student when I won the award, working under the supervision of Professor George Dickson and Dr Linda Popplewell. Currently, I am continuing my PhD in the same laboratory, working in the area of gene therapy for Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy (DMD). DMD is a muscle wasting disease that affects 1 in 3,500 males where the patients become wheelchair bound before the age of 12 and die in their early twenties. This disease is caused by mutations in a gene that translates into a protein called dystrophin, which is important in maintaining the integrity of muscle fibres and protecting them from damage.

The 2017 MDA Scientific Conference brought together influential professionals in the academic, government, industrial and clinical arenas who work in various ways to help drive scientific and therapeutic advancements and discoveries, focusing on neuromuscular disorders. This provided me with an opportunity to learn from others and improve my own skills and knowledge about the field, which was then transferred to my research team members when I returned. In addition, nearly 450 leaders in the neuromuscular field gathered for this prestigious conference to share critical updates on a wide range of scientific topics. This was an excellent opportunity to network and look for collaboration opportunities which was extremely valuable for me and the Dickson and Popplewell research team.

In addition to attending the conference, I also met Professor Terence Partridge, a DMD expert based in Washington. This meeting was essential to discuss my work and seek collaboration opportunities with the Partridge Lab which will be valuable for my PhD and my research team.

This conference was an invaluable experience that will definitely shape the future of my PhD and I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Royal Holloway, University of London for providing me this opportunity via Santander Travel Award.