2022 ESDR meeting: an eye-opening experience

As my interest in dermatological research grew during the COVID-19 pandemic, my experience in the field outside my current projects is minimal, given the increased workload and travel restrictions. The 2022 ESDR meeting gave me an opportunity to attend an international conference with a primary focus on dermatological research, which marked the point where I got a chance to step outside my work environment and see what other fellow researchers in the world were doing. After spending four wonderful days in Amsterdam, I can say that the 2022 ESDR meeting is much more than just about scientists showing off their work.

Of course, the ESDR meeting is fundamentally rooted in disseminating the latest knowledge in dermatology to the scientific community. The 2022 ESDR meeting was packed with a great range of content to accommodate people with different research tastes, from advanced right-off-the-bench experiments to clinical trials and big data. The welcomeness to discussions of the speakers helped ease the environment for someone like me, a novice in the field who is eager to learn. The meeting also featured sessions that presented a new perspective of skin research, such as dermatoendocrinology, to invite attendants to think outside the box. Of all the sessions, I give my personal favourite to the Clinical Saturday talk by Dr Guillaume Canaud, in which he sought the treatment of a once-believed incurable disease from basic science experiments and expanded it to a compassionate program that allowed drug access to patients worldwide. His work is an excellent example of how researchers can make an impact on patients’ lives.

Even more impressive than the cutting-edge science, the 2022 ESDR meeting emphasised the importance of borderless collaborations. Many papers presented in this meeting were produced through collaborations between different universities, different countries, or even between academics and industries. Global Health Initiative also allowed researchers from developing countries to share research impediments they experienced with colleagues from countries that faced similar situations. I believe that these modes of information sharing could offer a sustainable solution for driving dermatological research forward in countries that do not yet have access to necessary equipment but have biological specimens and service data that can be explored.

Moreover, I felt empowered by joining the Future Leader Symposium, especially Dr Tamar Nijsten’s talk. I strongly agreed with him that using my energy to do something I am passionate about the content can put me in the right direction. This topic is close to my heart because I am one of a few people in my country who follow an unconventional path of dermatology training to pursue research interests, and it has been hard for me to defend myself against the social norm that believes residency is the only option for dermatology training. In this meeting, I met people with various academic backgrounds and work experiences who understood my choice and gave me helpful advice on building my career in academic dermatology. I feel energised to know that there are colleagues who appreciate the concept of people trying to reach the same goal via different career paths.

I would like to thank the ESDR committee for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Despite the difficulties, I do not regret initiating my research activities during the pandemic as the work got me to the 2022 ESDR meeting. The meeting not only gave me the scope of the latest knowledge and research trend in dermatology but also reignited my passion for staying on course to become a dermatological researcher. Although I still have a long way to go in terms of career path build-up, I hope it will not be too late to reach out to the ESDR for mentorship and collaboration by the time I finish my training.