

Cultural, Professional and Experiential Reflections

First CINP Research Fellowship for Early Careers: Bridging Scientific Goals and Professional Networking

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Participating in scientific conferences and professional networking support productivity in research. However, there are barriers for early career scientists to benefit from these activities. In 2023, the International College of Neuropsychopharmacology (CINP) Committee for Early Careers organised the first edition of the *CINP Research Fellowship for Early Careers* to support international collaboration of junior neuroscientists and facilitate in-person exchange between early career and senior investigators. The programme included online and in-person sessions, the latter during the *34th CINP World Congress* in Montreal. Selected fellows had the opportunity to learn and make round-table discussions with renowned scientists, including Professors Paola Dazzan, Alan Frazer, Gabriella Gobbi, Anthony Grace, Oliver Howes, Kazutaka Ikeda, Kazuyuki Nakagome, Maria Oquendo, Dan Rujescu, Eric Vermetten, and Joseph Zohar, enabling early career researchers to understand each mentor's main scientific trajectory and research methodology. The underpinning aim to support the global networking of early career researchers was achieved through the programme, as evidenced by the ensuing collaborative projects.

INTRODUCTION

For their professional and personal growth, early career (EC) neuroscientists need opportunities to enrich their knowledge and skills and network with colleagues and experts.¹ However, attending international events such as conferences or courses is not always easy for this group due to the cost of attendance, lack of mentorship, and limited scientific material to present.² In 2023, the International College of Neuropsychopharmacology (CINP), a worldwide scientific organisation more than 60 years old dedicated to research and education,³ organised the first *CINP Research Fellowship for Early Careers* to help address the need for global scientific collaboration for EC investigators.

This first edition – themed “Precise medicine and difficult to treat cases – from neuroscience to bedside” – comprised a hybrid programme to bring together a group of EC

researchers in neuroscience from across the globe to collaborate on scientific projects under the mentorship of prominent experts. Applicants were evaluated based on their EC status, curriculum vitae, motivational letters, research interests, and project proposals. Overall, 27 participants from 16 different countries (Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Somalia, Taiwan, United States, and the United Kingdom) with diverse professional backgrounds (including psychiatry, pharmacy, and biology) were selected.

RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

The first *CINP Research Fellowship* provided a blended learning experience with two main components: online sessions through March and April 2023 and an in-person pro-

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gramme during the *34th CINP World Congress* held in Montreal, Canada, on 7-10th May 2023.

ONLINE PROGRAMME

Four 60-minute online sessions delivered in March and April 2023 provided breakthrough insights into basic and clinical neuroscience.

Each online session was allocated to a different psychopathology with a leading expert covering clinical and research aspects and included time for interactive discussion. The first session by the CINP President Professor Joseph Zohar concerned “Standard of Care and Precision in obsessive-compulsive disorder treatment”. Professor Anthony Grace delved into dopaminergic transmission, its disruptions in schizophrenia, and mechanisms of actions of traditional and novel antipsychotic agents in the second session in a talk titled “Traditional and novel antipsychotic drugs: Issues related to efficacy and clinical trials”. The third session benefitted from the expertise of Professor Eric Vermetten, an academic military psychiatrist in the field of stress, trauma, and complex PTSD, capped with a prolific discussion on novel pharmacological approaches in psychotraumatology debating about “Staging approaches to PTSD”. The online programme concluded with Professor Maria Oquendo’s session about “Neuroscience behind Suicidal Behaviour”, focusing on the most recent neuroimaging findings about suicidal behaviours in mood disorder and their scientific and clinical relevance.

IN-PERSON PROGRAMME

The in-person component of the Research Fellowship consisted of several activities spread over the four days of the *34th CINP World Congress* held in Montreal, Canada, between 7th and 10th May 2023.

The Congress Research Fellowship programme started with a special Welcome Reception, where fellows met in person on the first day (7th May). During the Reception, CINP President Joseph Zohar, Past President Pierre Blier, President-Elect Kazutaka Ikeda, and Professor Anthony Grace welcomed the fellows and explained the philosophy behind the Research Fellowship and its benefits for young researchers. Fellows then had time to network and have exchanges about scientific interests, job roles, considerations about previous online sessions, and expectations for the upcoming Congress activities.

On the second and third days of Congress (8th-9th May), in-person Research Fellowship sessions – concerning “Project Design and Choosing the Appropriate Research Method in Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry” and “Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting Results”, respectively – took place as round tables with world-renowned neuroscientists Professors Anthony Grace, Dan Rujescu, Maria Oquendo, and Eric Vermetten. Benefitting from their experience and wise guidance, the fellows were mentored through different aspects of conducting a research project, from project design and choice of appropriate methodology to data collection, analysis, and reporting results, as well as critical matters such as ethical concerns. Fellows also

had the unique opportunity to discuss their backgrounds, interests, and current research projects with the faculty and each other in a supportive atmosphere characterised by genuine interest in different experiences and openness to new scientific ideas.

On the last day of Congress (10th May), a final meeting was held to discuss one of the expected outcomes of the Research Fellowship, a collaborative research project with the ultimate goal of publication by the fellows in a scientific journal. Each fellow contributed with their own interests and perspectives to find inspiration for their future research, and multiple proposals emerged. The group agreed on a survey study project focusing on the common barriers for EC researchers across the globe.

The Research Fellowship programme then concluded with Professor Kazutaka Ikeda presenting the certificates of completion to the fellows.

Complementing the Research Fellowship sessions, an EC track of symposia (open to all Congress participants) was integrated into the Congress programme. Fellows had the opportunity to join other EC researchers across seven sessions in which distinguished neuroscientists discussed continuous professional development. Groundbreakers in the field of neuroscience such as Professors Paola Dazzan, Alan Frazer, Gabriella Gobbi, Anthony Grace, Oliver Howes, Kazuyuki Nakagome, and Dan Rujescu mentored ECs with their expertise, guiding them on how to progress in their research careers, establish independence as investigators, conduct and publish their research, combine clinical and research practice, find a balance between academic roles and private life, and deal with career advancement issues. Numerous inquiries were posed to female scientists, addressing the overt and subtle challenges women encounter in academic settings. They explored the delicate balance between motherhood, family, and research career, as well as the representation of women in leadership roles within the realms of neuroscience, mental health, and the broader scientific community. The sessions were marked by a high degree of interactivity, allowing the participants to exchange educational experiences, ask questions, and receive advice from experts with compassionate guidance for each participant’s background and interests.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

The professional pathway of EC researchers, particularly in clinical academia, can be challenging, time and energy-consuming, or limited by lack of mentoring, which could be demoralising.⁴ Since EC researchers represent a large and crucial portion of the scientific workforce^{5,6} and are the future of the field, there is an absolute need to involve them in efforts to favour change and improvement.

In line with the CINP’s educational mission, its first *Research Fellowship for Early Careers* provided rather conference-naïve young scientists with a precious space to learn, discuss, reflect, and share. The theme of this first Research Fellowship, “Precise medicine and difficult to treat cases – from neuroscience to bedside”, was representative of many fellows’ daily work life and their continuous effort to in-

tegrate the products of their research activity into clinical practice and vice versa. A well-planned learning programme represented an engaging opportunity for the fellows to be involved in top-tier educational activities provided by renowned faculty members.

However, the Research Fellowship was not limited to learning in the narrowest sense of the term. Indeed, the welcoming and highly dynamic environment that has marked the Research Fellowship – especially in its in-person part – has allowed the participants not only to increase their knowledge but also to find inspiration and collaborators for their future research, develop an awareness of their role, and access support and mentorship, bolstering their chances to develop successful careers as researchers in neuroscience.

Collaboration and productivity are strongly correlated in research.⁷ One of the highlights of the Research Fellowship was that it favoured networking among fellows during and after the formal programme. The fellows from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds laid the foundations for a community that can enhance professional exchange among ECs worldwide. The fellows keep in contact with each other and collaborate on different projects, showing that enduring connections were made through the Research Fellowship.

Attending conferences provides excellent learning opportunities but, more importantly, positively impacts participants' motivation.⁸ The first *Research Fellowship for Early Careers* was a success in both learning and social perspectives, a refreshing and enriching experience for professional and personal development and current and future international collaborations. The CINP is devoted to con-

tinuing this educational role to support the next generation of scientists and physicians in mental health and neuroscience. This commitment is underscored by the acknowledgement that the participation of women and underrepresented minorities is indispensable for the progression of knowledge and scientific advancement. This is so because diverse groups are more likely to have assorted experience and expertise, which can lead to the generation of innovative ideas. Concurrently, the organisation actively fosters cross-cultural interactions and endeavours among countries to promote science and the advancement of knowledge.

In conclusion, establishing enduring collaborations, extensive networking opportunities, and guided mentorship allowed the first *CINP Research Fellowship for Early Careers* to be successful.

For future editions, there are a few points that could help improve the Research Fellowship programme. Promoting the event even more in low- and middle-income countries could help increase the representation of EC researchers working in those environments. Also, since the Research Fellowship enables fellows to attend the most significant global neuropsychopharmacology meeting of the year, that is, the CINP World Congress, arranging the schedule in a way that avoids overlap of the Research Fellowship programme itself with the Congress' other scheduled activities as far as possible would allow Research Fellowship participants to enjoy the complete scientific programme.

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