

## The CUA-AUA International Fellows Exchange Program: New Orleans 2015

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**T**he AUA-CUA International Fellows Exchange Program is a fantastic opportunity to visit the AUA in a structured format, review and present on a topic of interest, and liaise with urologic colleagues worldwide. I applied to the program to have a funded opportunity to visit the AUA for the first time. The program is well-organized and involves a pre-AUA webinar, followed by a dinner presentation on the final day of the AUA. Each fellow is required to review a poster/podium on a topic of interest.

One thing discussed at the pre-AUA webinar is the size of the AUA itself. As a first time attendee, it quickly became clear that trying to experience the entire AUA is impossible. Especially considering that at any given time there are simultaneous plenary, podium and poster sessions covering a wide range of topics, in addition to the plethora of courses and hands-on forums, it is easy to become overwhelmed. I decided to focus on cancer immunotherapy via checkpoint blockade, as this is a research interest of mine and has been the focus of intense global research of late. Briefly, antibodies that block suppressive T-cell co-signalling may promote T-cell activity against cancer (recognizing cancer as "non-self"). Impressive clinical results have been observed across multiple tumour types including metastatic urothelial and renal cell carcinomas, where patient outcomes are typically poor. Currently, multiple phase III studies are underway following positive early phase clinical trials. Focusing on this topic, I was able to review several posters studying the biology of checkpoint blockade and discuss findings with their authors. This gave structure to the AUA and allowed me to pursue my research interests in a meaningful way. The discussions with authors allowed me to shape my own research

ideas. Moreover, these authors came from all over the world and it was a nice opportunity to chat about urologic research and practice patterns worldwide.

Immune checkpoint blockade highlights two important things in clinical oncology. The first is a paradigm shift in cancer treatment, as checkpoint blockade is directed towards modulating the patient's own immune system as opposed to directly targeting malignant cells. The second is immune therapy representing an additional pillar in cancer management. Checkpoint blockade has become extremely popular of late, especially with FDA approval of new, targeted agents in melanoma and lung cancer. There is now an AUA update on this topic highlighting its importance in urological education and practice. This is an exciting field that our patients are benefiting from currently, and as always, further research is required to improve patient selection and outcomes.

The highlight of the CUA-AUA International Fellows program is the dinner presentation that takes place on the last day of the AUA. Each fellow reviewed their topic of interest, from sperm motility studies to new options in BPH management. The presentations require a critical appraisal of the selected research topic, and thus having the chance to talk directly with the author is very helpful. The feedback for the presenters helps to further improve their oral presentation skills. I thank the CUA, AUA and industry partnerships that helped establish such a strong program, and hope this opportunity is available for residents in the future. It is certainly an experience I would strongly recommend.

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