

Young GI angle: UEG Research Fellowship – Two fellows' experiences

INTRODUCTION

Several motivations drive researchers to leave their current positions and go abroad.^{1,2} It can be a requirement for a job position, a need to perfect skills, a step forward to an international network, or for other reasons, including personal. Whatever are the motivations, it is always a challenging decision and organization. Changing of country, the team, the environment, and no longer being in your habits will challenge you and allow you to grow faster. After this experience, you will become more competent in your domain, with a robust research network, and help raise your research team with your acquired knowledge.

Since 2019, UEG has awarded one researcher per year with the UEG Research Fellowship to spend one year with a renowned European principal investigator (<https://ueg.eu/opportunities/research-funding/research-fellowship>). The purpose of this grant is to support both basic and clinical researchers and both medical and non-medical graduates to improve their scientific skills. This grant is an excellent opportunity before establishing research activities in your department.

UEG RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP 2019—MICHAL'S EXPERIENCE

It was a great honor for me to receive the first United European Gastroenterology Research Fellowship in 2019. I was first interested in improving my endoscopic and clinical skills in a GI-Center abroad. Unfortunately, in the beginning—my first attempts to apply for the UEG Clinical Visiting Fellowships were not successful. Finally, I contacted Prof. Rui Tato Marinho from the University Hospital de Santa Maria in Lisbon. He invited me to do a short-term clinical-endoscopy fellowship, which helped me improve my skills and CV. Afterward, I participated in UEG initiatives such as “CV-check” meetings during UEG Week, which helped me prepare a concise and structured application. That worked perfectly and allowed me to be awarded a Clinical Visiting Fellowship 2018 at Klinikum Grosshadern Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. This allowed me to broaden

my horizons in clinical endoscopy and introduced me to the world of interdisciplinary and translational research in the Pancreas Research Group headed by Prof. Julia Mayerle. It is a leading basic science and translational medicine research group, and I was amazed at the research opportunities in modern pancreatology. During my stay, we started to plan possible future collaborations, and at that time, a call for application for the first UEG Research Fellowship appeared. This seemed to be a perfect opportunity, and with the great support of the Pancreas Research Group members, I got the application ready.

Our project entitled “*Role of microlithiasis NLRP3 inflammasome activation in papillitis and acute pancreatitis*” was successful, and this way, I became the first UEG Research Fellowship awardee. Fantastic feeling! At that time, I was an internal medicine specialist, continuing fellowship in gastroenterology at the University Hospital in Katowice, Poland. After the announcement of the grant, I only had 5 months to organize my stay in Munich and move my life to another country. This was probably the most challenging part for me. However, I cannot express how much support I got from my family and new team. It was a year of significant changes in my personal and scientific life and worldwide. The COVID19 pandemic emerged in the final months of 2020, and due to excellent work organization did not manage to thwart our plans, and my research continued.³ I received excellent training in basic science pancreatology procedures, although it was not easy to switch from a clinician's perspective to a brand new reality of laboratory research. I was introduced to in vitro procedures concerning acute pancreatitis models and completed training to handle animals. We have established an NLRP3 activation model in acute pancreatitis which is currently tested, and I am thrilled to be still involved in the progress of this research. Moreover, we managed to broaden our project by involving clinical collaboration which resulted in the new consensus of microlithiasis and biliary sludge definition, presented at European and American Pancreatic scientific summits. We currently continue our collaboration in projects which will involve also collaboration on clinical and basic science field.

I came back to Poland with a head full of ideas, new perspectives, skills, great enthusiasm, and a rich network of new contacts. Shortly after my comeback, I was offered a position in a leading endoscopy

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and research unit at Maria Skłodowska-Curie National Institute of Oncology in Warsaw, where I continue my work in the field of pancreatology. The UEG Research Fellowship helped me establish and maintain a fantastic collaboration with researchers in Munich, and new projects and grant applications are underway.

I want to express my great thanks to fantastic people for the outstanding help and for making this experience possible: Prof. Julia Mayerle, Dr. Ujjwal Mahajan, Dr. Georg Beyer, Dr. Ivonne Regel, Dr. Simon Sirtl, and all my Friends from the Pancreas Research Group at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich.

UEG RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP 2020—CHLOÉ'S EXPERIENCE

I should probably start at the first beginning, why did I decide to go for an internship abroad? During my residency, my interest in research grew-up. I first followed a master thesis for 1 year and had the great opportunity to spend a 6-month internship in Professor Jan Tack's Department at Leuven, Belgium. This first European experience was amazing and comforted my interest in research and neurogastroenterology. In 2014, as soon as I got specialized in Gastroenterology, I started a PhD in neurogastroenterology, in parallel with my clinical work. I had the chance to be mentored by Pr. Philippe Ducrotté in his last years.⁴ Later, I got a position of assistant professor at Rouen University hospital but I really missed his valuable supervision and I wanted to continue to improve my skills, learn more as a clinical researcher and increase my research network. I thought which place would be the best for an international post-doctoral position in my topic, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). I wanted a new experience, and Pr. Magnus Simrén is of course a well-known leader in the field and has a particular interest in the role of diet in IBS. Sweden was a good destination for my goals and my family. I quickly contacted him at the NeuroGASTRO meeting 2019 in Lisbon. Less than 1 month later, I visited his department, where I afterward spent 2 years. After agreeing on my stay for one year, starting in summer 2020, we started looking for funding. Unfortunately, neurogastroenterology is not the most recognized field in our specialty and it would have been much easier to find funds for an internship in other subspecialties such as Oncology, Endoscopy or Inflammatory Bowel Disease.⁵ In France, there was only one grant I could apply for, from the French Society of Gastroenterology, unfortunately, I got a negative answer. The UEG Research Fellowship seemed unreachable to me, one grant for Europe! I also knew that UEG is fair and promotes women and minorities. I wrote a proposal in close collaboration with Magnus. My project was entitled "A New Gas-sensing Capsule to Understand the Mechanisms of Fructan in Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and the Link to Gut microbiota Composition and Function". After getting the incredible news that I was awarded the UEG Research Fellowship 2020, I continued to prepare for my fellowship, both for my research plan but also from a personal point of view. In my experience Gothenburg University and Magnus

Simrén were of great help. Regarding my research project, we submitted the ethical application before arriving in Sweden. Everything was ready to start at the beginning of my stay. Unfortunately, due to the Covid pandemic, I had to wait a few months before starting the patients' inclusion. In between, I started working with many others projects. No matter, I learnt a lot in contact of amazing people that were working there, and I found exactly what I was looking for. The most important points for me were (1) to be fully dedicated to research and (2) to work in such a stimulating environment. Magnus was a wonderful supervisor, able to give me the freedom needed to progress, and also to provide relevant advice to guide me. Finally, I had the chance to extend my stay for 2 years and I am really grateful to UEG, to all my colleagues in France, that let me go, and to Pr. Magnus Simrén for this amazing experience. I really realize how it has increased my research network and gave me opportunities to collaborate in many interesting projects.

What I can conclude is that my experience was wonderful and rich, and if I have to do it again I won't hesitate for a single second. I was particularly happy to be able to have this experience at this stage of my career (i.e. 2 years after my PhD defense) and not earlier, the experience was even better. The UEG Research Fellowship provides one of the best opportunities to spend 1 year with a European leader in your field, with all the necessary safety required.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Michal Zorniak and Chloé Melchior have been awarded the UEG Research Award 2019 and 2020.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the content of this manuscript.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed equally in the conception and writing of this editorial.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were analysed during the current manuscript.

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