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Introduction: Special issue on Aging Science Talks: Science for our community during isolation

This special issue of the Translational Medicine of Aging (TMA) highlights the personal and research experiences of the individuals who organized and/or participated in the online seminar series “Aging Science Talks: Science for the Community.” This new community of inquiry (CoI) around the biology of aging was organized due to the wide-spread cancellation of regional, national and international meetings focused on the biology of aging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The establishment of this community, organized in mid-March by Dr. Dudley Lamming and Dr. William Mair, was focused on providing presentation and networking opportunities to early career researchers (ECRs).

Three articles in this special issue of TMA were submitted by the organizers and their trainees. Carter and Lamming [1] describe the use of pedagogical teaching tools related to online education to create a “community of inquiry (CoI)” specifically around the biology of aging. This CoI framework represents an approach to creating a deep and meaningful (collaborative-constructivist) learning experience through the development of social, cognitive and teaching presences. Mair [2] and Smith [3], a trainee in the Mair lab and a frequent host for Aging Science Talks, describe their personal perspectives on the creation of Aging Science Talks, the lessons learned, and their thoughts on how conferences may change going forward as a result.

With the assistance of TMA editors Drs. Matt Kaerberlein and Scott Leiser, this special issue extends our CoI further by giving a voice to some of those researchers, primarily but not exclusively ECRs, who took up our call and helped successfully launch the Aging Science Talks CoI through the presentation of their research during the early days of the pandemic shutdown. In order of presentation at “Aging Science Talks”:

1. Dr. Javier Apfeld presents “The heat shock transcription factor HSF-1 protects *Caenorhabditis elegans* from peroxide stress” [4].
2. Dr. Danielle Mor from Dr. Coleen T. Murphy’s laboratory discusses “Mitochondrial hyperactivity as a potential therapeutic target in Parkinson’s disease” [5].
3. Dr. Emily Goldberg discusses “Integration of immune-metabolic signals to preserve healthy aging” [6].
4. Dr. Helen Goodridge discusses “Role of hematopoietic Aging in Cognitive Decline” [7].
5. Dr. Dorota Skowronska-Krawczyk discusses “ELOVL2: not just a biomarker of aging” [8].
6. Dr. Payel Sen discusses “High-throughput chromatin screens to identify targets of senescence and aging” [9] and reviews “The eroding chromatin landscape of aging stem cells” [10].
7. Dr. Nicole Noren Hooten, Ph.D. discusses “Extracellular Vesicles and Extracellular RNA in Aging and Age-related Disease” [11].

What is the current fate of the seminar, and how are we still trying to accomplish our goals of creating an online CoI around the biology of aging? Our initial participation level in the seminar was approximately 300/day from March to June, but as the world returns to the bench there has been less time for individuals to participate. However, meetings are still canceled, international travel is still restricted, and there is still a need to maintain community. We have continuously adapted, and starting in September will switch to a new symposium format twice per month, organized and run by ECRs. We hope you will continue to join us, or join us for the first time: a schedule and links for all Aging Science Talks are available at <http://www.lamminglab.org/agingscitalks.html>.

This seminar series and this accompanying Special Issue describing the outcomes of this series have accomplished many things. First, we have created a forum for presenters, especially ECRs to highlight their work. We have created a forum for those presenters to publish their work, albeit in an extending abstract format to highlight their ongoing research. We have also highlighted the challenges of a PI and ECR in this time of COVID and how the seminar influenced their perspectives. Finally, we provide a way forward to maintain this community by still involving ECRs, considering the barrier of time zones, and appreciating time limitations of scientists returning to work during this pandemic.

References

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