

I had the privilege of being awarded a BAD Research Taster Bursary this year. I was invited by Professor O'Toole and Dr O'Shaughnessy to visit the Blizard Institute laboratories at Barts and The London Medical School, as I am considering taking time out of my Dermatology training to undertake a PhD with this group. I hadn't done lab work for approximately ten years, since my Medical School intercalated BSc, and thought that this would be a good opportunity to see how I got on in the lab and whether I could hack three years of it.

The team were very accommodating and happy to show me the ropes. My week was rather fluid and I drifted between team members depending on what experiments they had on the go and what they thought would be useful for me to see. I quickly came to understand the basics of the lab and that the bread and butter of the job, namely cell culture, immunostaining and western blotting. Keratinocytes were grown in incubators from cell lines that were brought out of the cryogenic freezer. The cells were often manipulated genetically to model diseases, such as harlequin ichthyosis, where ABCA12 knock outs were used. The cells were nurtured and coaxed with various media and environmental conditions, like a stubborn child. The cell lines were then either grown into an organotypic (a 3D cell structure simulating the skin), lysed to release their protein components or stained with immunostains.

The pace of the lab surprised me. Coming from a clinical background where there is pressure to see multiple patients in a short space of time, the lab was a complete antithesis. Indeed, stressors exist, but the pace was slower and there was more time to think; understandably because a minor mistake could wreck weeks of work.

I found the practical skills novel and completely different to what I was used to. The team trusted me with basic techniques, such as pipetting, and I was surprised how quickly I took to this. Most importantly I enjoyed the work and my involvement didn't end in any catastrophic disaster (as I had feared!). The principals of lab work started to make sense and this foreign world has now become more inviting.

Following this taster week I have decided to apply for funding with this group and to embark on the journey of a PhD. I would like to thank Professor O'Toole, Dr O'Shaughnessy and the members of their teams for being so accommodating and to the BAD for facilitating this taster week.