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Kinetoplastid Molecular Cell Biology Meeting, Massachusetts, USA

The kinetoplastid molecular cell biology meeting (KMCB) is, without doubt, the biggest event in my field. It is held every two years at the Woods Hole marine biology institute two hours South of Boston and is a good chance to see what the field is thinking and the direction that it is heading.

The KMCB is attended by many pioneers of cell biology and inevitably there are lots of potential reviewers in the audience. So it was with some anxiety that I found out that not only had I got a talk at the KMCB 2015 meeting, but I was also given poster presentation. This had the potential to be either a fantastic opportunity that would really boost my career, or an unmitigated disaster...

Actually, the timing was perfect. I had just finished the first draft of a manuscript I was hoping to submit by the summer so this would be a great opportunity to see what my peers thought of it ("general interest", "specialist", or, worst case scenario, "flawed") and hopefully impress potential reviewers with the quality and confidence of my presentation skills (or not...).

The quality of the science that was presented was, as ever at the KCMB, excellent. There were dramatic fights between PIs, busy discussions hunched over laptops and coffee between sessions and much "networking" late into the night. One session was dedicated to Elisabetta Ullu, a leader in the field who tragically passed away last year. The introduction was given by a close friend of hers and had the whole audience close to tears.

We were presenting a poster on high throughput genetic tagging of trypanosome genes that we had just published in RSOB. We now use this extensively in our lab and our poster was an opportunity to promote the technology and establish it in the field. The poster sessions at the KCMB are unusually well attended compared with other conferences I have been to – and rightly so. They provide a fantastic opportunity to talk to the people actually doing the science and are often more interesting than the talks. Our poster got a lot of interest – not least because people wanted to know if we had tagged their favourite gene – and I have since sent out the reagents to labs worldwide.

My own talk was scheduled for the last day and I was presenting one of the main outputs from my fellowship. I had been looking at a specialised flagellum structure called the transition zone. In particular, I was focused on finding new components and showing the roles they have in building and maintaining a flagellum and using them to obtain insights into human disease of the flagellum.

Despite my nervousness (and the final night party playing Abba until 04:00 outside my room) the talk itself went well and I was able to speak to colleagues afterwards about my work. These discussions were very encouraging and together we thought of some good experiments that I am now in the process of performing.

Applying to the Society of Biology appealed to me because of its long history and its broad interests in many aspects of biology. The application procedure itself was straightforward and the staff were helpful and supportive. I am very grateful for the Society of Biology's help in attending this conference and it has made a real difference to my career.