



The winter is over and the spring is knocking on the door. After a short Easter break, we are back with some important announcements and news.

As always, we are happy to hear from you or see you at our meetings and social events. If you have any feedback, questions or ideas, feel free to contact us on: [ecsa@iarc.fr](mailto:ecsa@iarc.fr)

## IARC Junior Investigator Awards Programme

As you may have heard, IARC offered an internal grant opportunity to encourage junior investigators to develop their own innovative, high-risk research projects. The awards provided an opportunity for junior investigators to gain experience as a principal investigator in obtaining competitive research funding. A total of 20 applications were received and each was reviewed by two members of the IARC Scientific Council and by the Director.

We are proud to announce that two of the ECSA members (a post-doctoral fellow and a PhD student) were awarded this grant.

We congratulate **Anya Burton** (ENV) and **Hana Hušková** (MCA/MMB) for their great achievement.

Projects awarded:

Anya



Bracken fern and ptaquiloside exposure study in communities living in an oesophageal cancer hotspot of Tanzania (ESCAPE-Bracken)

Hana



Identification of the whole-genome AID mutational signature to link exposures and cancer (MutSigAID)<sup>\*)</sup>



<sup>\*)</sup> Two collaborators – Athena Sklias (MCA/EGE) and Maude Ardin (MCA/MMB) – both ECSA members as well

## Roundtable with Dr. Subramanian



On Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016, ECSA celebrated International Women's Day by talking to an inspirational female cancer economist, Dr. Sujha Subramanian. Dr. Subramanian is a long standing collaborator with IARC and a fellow at RTI International. During the roundtable, she expressed her passion for her work. Her advice to ECSA members relating to personal career development encouraged us to be "go getters" and recognize the opportunities that come our way. She also emphasised the importance of being flexible enough to move with the times and be aware that we may need to re-invent ourselves from time to time. She also talked about the importance of staying true to the

science and working for a company or institution with compatible ideals and values to our own. We all enjoyed the time spent with Dr. Subramanian and thank her for sharing her passion for research.

## ECSA Tea Party

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> March, Aoibheann Dunne hosted the ECSA Tea Party. She baked a delicious banoffee cake and rice krispie buns for us. We thank Aoibheann for the pleasant afternoon! Hope to see you all at the next tea party in April.



## 5 minutes with ... *Akram Ghantous*

Have you ever wondered how people end up at IARC? In each newsletter, we introduce one of the early career scientists roaming our halls and ask them about their story. This time we interviewed a successful Lebanese researcher in epigenetics, *Akram Ghantous*, who after a 3-year postdoctoral fellowship has recently obtained a scientist position at the Agency.



### About science ...

#### What is your current area of research?

Cancer and environmental epigenetics

#### What section/group are you working with?

I am a scientist in the Epigenetics Group (EGE) of the Mechanisms of Carcinogenesis Section (MCA).

#### What project are you working on at IARC?

My research focuses on identifying epigenetic precursors of cancer and their environmental/lifestyle determinants. Rare cancers, including childhood cancers, represent a philanthropic interest, especially as they provide little economic benefit for the pharmaceutical market and other industries. Tackling rare cancers must be an international effort. IARC helps to provide resources to achieve this goal. Moreover, tumour types that are globally rare might be common in specific regions and likely associated with environmental risk factors that are unique to those regions.

#### Why did you decide to come to IARC?

It is a long story. Initially, my plans were to pursue my PhD in the US, after having ranked first in Lebanon for the International Fulbright Award. However, during the same period, the American University of Beirut (AUB) obtained the accreditation to reinstate the Lebanese PhD programme that had been terminated for over 40 years since the Lebanese civil war. Endorsed by the Lebanese government and AUB, I embarked on the more interesting challenge to contribute to the initiation of the PhD programme in my home country, which later became a proof-of-concept for the ability to efficiently produce from limited resources good quality research in a developing country. Then after receiving my PhD, I was fortunate to obtain a faculty position in Lebanon. However, at the same time when life seemed to have offered me the work stability essential for my family and young kids, it presented to me another opportunity and challenge, the IARC Postdoctoral Fellowship. I took this new challenge with great ambition, keeping in mind that if research mobility had to be a choice during my career then it had better be taken before my research roots become more firmly grounded. Fortunately, my fruitful experience at IARC, including ongoing collaborations with Lebanon, has confirmed that this was a wise decision, its outcomes of which I am eager to further extend and invest in additional challenges.

#### Can you describe your career history so far?

2001–2004: BSc, Major in Biology, Minor in Chemistry, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

2004–2006: MSc in Biology, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

2008–2009: Fellowship in Mathematics, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

2007–2012: PhD in Cell & Molecular Biology, American University of Beirut, Lebanon (research in collaboration with Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

2012–2016: Postdoctoral Fellow, International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon, France

2016–present: Scientist, International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon, France

### About life ...

#### What are your hobbies?

I have two daughters (5 and 8 years) who are my greatest hobby. I love playing with them: hide-and-seek, reading and acting some stories, rollerblading, ice skating, and conducting some fun science experiments at home (of course, kid friendly). They also enjoy a lot drawing and painting with me – a hobby I took up at young age. I am also a big fan of strategy-based board games.

#### If you had to choose a quote, phrase or expression that described you or how you see yourself, or how you see the world around you, what would it be?

As Friedrich Nietzsche said it, “That which does not kill us, makes us stronger”. Actually, this represents a motto I share with someone close, especially that we have both had some similar life experience and have similar perceptions in life. We keep reminding each other with it at hard times!

#### And at the end what would be your suggestion, recommendation, wise words to the starting postdocs here at IARC?

Set ambitious goals and be persistent, focused and positive, while finding the right balance between work and social life. Engage yourself in collaborations, be a leader, and .... participate in ECSA!