

## ISSCR 2026 Annual Meeting

### International Society for Stem Cell Research

Palais des congrès de Montréal, Montréal, Canada | 8–11 July 2026

#### *Travel Grant Report*

In July 2026, I had the privilege of attending the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) 2026 Annual Meeting in Montréal, Canada, held from 8 to 11 July at the Palais des congrès. Thanks to the generous support of the travel grant, I was able to present my own work and to immerse myself fully in what was, for me, the first time attending a scientific conference of this magnitude. Bringing together nearly 3,500 participants from around the world, the meeting far exceeded any gathering I had experienced before, and its scale left a lasting impression on me.

What struck me most was the vibrancy of the society itself. Coming from a research environment where the pluripotency field can feel comparatively narrow, I was genuinely impressed by how engaging and collegial the atmosphere was across such a large and diverse community. The programme spanned the entire breadth of stem cell science, and the many different scientific facets of induced pluripotent stem cell (iPSC) research on display made me appreciate, more acutely than ever, just how diverse and rapidly evolving the field has become. Sessions moved fluidly between reprogramming mechanisms, disease modelling, developmental biology, and translational applications, and I frequently found myself drawn to talks well outside my immediate area of expertise.

The calibre of the invited speakers was extraordinary. I had the honour of listening to Shinya Yamanaka, whose discovery of iPSCs continues to shape the direction of the entire field, as well as to Azim Surani and numerous other leading scientists whose work I had until then known only from the literature. Hearing these researchers speak in person, and witnessing the intellectual exchange their lectures provoked, was both humbling and deeply motivating. These keynotes conveyed not only the state of the art but also a sense of where the field is heading, and they reinforced my conviction of the value of pluripotent stem cell research.

Beyond the biology itself, the meeting offered a window into the newest enabling technologies. I was particularly captivated by advances in imaging that move well beyond conventional confocal microscopy, allowing whole organs to be imaged rapidly and at high resolution. Such approaches promise to transform how we study tissue architecture in three dimensions, and they opened new methodological angles that I intend to consider for my own work.

I was also grateful for the opportunity to present a poster about my own research on pluripotent stem cells derived from the African pygmy mouse (*Mus minutoides*). Presenting to such a broad and knowledgeable audience challenged me to communicate my findings clearly and to situate them within the wider landscape of comparative and cross-species pluripotency research. The discussions that followed were stimulating, and the interest expressed by fellow researchers was both encouraging and instructive for the future direction of the project.

An additional highlight was the chance to meet Prof. Dr. Bernhard Payer, a member of my thesis committee, in person at the conference. Meeting in this informal yet scientifically rich setting allowed for valuable exchange and strengthened a connection directly relevant to my doctoral work.

In summary, ISSCR 2026 was an intellectually enriching and personally memorable experience. It broadened my scientific perspective, expanded my professional network, and gave me a renewed appreciation for the diversity of the stem cell research community. I am sincerely grateful for the travel grant!

