

**The 12<sup>th</sup> International conference of Immunology, 18-23 July 2004,  
Montreal.**

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The vibrant city of Montreal, Canada, was the setting for the International Conference of Immunology in 2004. The large Palais de Congress was an ideal venue, with all symposia and poster presentations held within the same building, allowing easy movement between sessions, although the room sizes meant it was sometimes impossible to find a seat in some of the more popular mini-symposium sessions! Having everything under one roof certainly encouraged interaction between sessions, and made the size of the conference (over 5000 people attended!) seem less daunting.

A full program was offered, with major symposium talks by eminent immunologists in the morning, followed by 25 mini-symposium sessions where speakers selected from submitted abstracts gave short presentations on recent work. The symposia were interspersed with poster sessions at breakfast and lunchtimes, along with industry presentations and workshops. On most of the days two concurrent keynote addresses were given by long-established scientists who have made major contributions to their fields. These included nobel prize-winner Rolf Zinkernagel, Richard Flavell and Peter Doherty. In the evenings time was allowed for exploring Montreal, and with several summer festivals in full swing (such as the "Just for Laughs" comedy festival) there was a real buzz as the streets were filled with people watching street performers and soaking up the atmosphere. On the final night of the conference we were treated to a performance by Cirque de Soleil, a French-themed circus, in the Bell Dome - home of the local ice hockey team.

In terms of science presented, Tregs once again were a major feature, popping up in many sessions as well as dedicated Treg sessions. Since my project is investigating the role of Tregs in mediating remission from autoimmune disease, this was a relatively easy way to be updated on recent developments in this rapidly moving and exciting field. A Major Symposium on the first day found the major players describing their recent (and often already published) work: Shimon Sakaguchi, Ethan Shevach, Fiona Powrie and Anne

O' Garra. As usual it was an interesting session, not least to find out what the current opinions of these dominant figures in this field are.

The role of costimulatory molecules was also a recurring theme. Costimulatory molecules such as B7, OX40, PD-1 and 4-1BB control the levels of activation of T cells. Their roles in terms of naïve T cell activation, memory cell activation, downregulation of T cell responses, as well as potential therapies for autoimmune conditions by targeting these molecules were described and discussed.

On a personal note, I found this conference a huge boost to my enthusiasm at a very useful point in my PhD. At many conferences the poster sessions can be disappointing, but on this occasion I received a large amount of interest in my work, which was extremely encouraging and helpful, especially since is being written up for publication. I made several important connections, and was even offered a post-doc position at the poster session! Giving a talk in a mini-symposium seemed at first a daunting task, but it has been a highly valuable (and surprisingly enjoyable) experience, and the questions I was asked were a useful guideline for main points to improve in the project. Overall, the conference experience has renewed my motivation to seek out a post-doc position in the States to further my academic career, and given me a useful starting point from which to do this. I would like to thank the James Rennie Committee for providing funding for this highly worthwhile trip.