



Association of Scientists of Indian Origin

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Rashmi Pathak (Co-chair)

Vivek Lawana (Councilor)

Volunteers

Shagun Krishna

Durgesh Dwivedi

Sharavan Ramachandran



President's Message

Vijay P. Kale, MVSc, PhD, DABT, ERT
Amgen Inc.

Sept 2020 Newsletter

Dear ASIO Family,

Hope you and your family are taking due care in this pandemic and are in great health. As a society, from beginning of the year 2020 we have been going through an upheaval- COVID19, lock downs, fight against social inequality and injustice, wildfires in Amazon forest and California, dramatic changes in the economies, disruption of schools and colleges, work-from-home to name a few. That's a lot to take in all at once! But I am sure we all will pass this phase with more resilience, adaptability and empathy than ever before.

I am happy to let you know that we have many updates to share with you. Details about these initiatives can be found in this newsletter.

- **ASIO Award Nomination Committee.** A new committee constituted to encourage and support nomination of ASIO members for SOT national awards. (see details on Page 05)
- **ASIO-SOT Best Paper Award.** This is a new award. (see details on Page 06)
- **Changes in the ASIO award application criteria.** Please [take a look](#) on ASIO website.
- **Website update.** We now have updated our website (<https://www.toxicology.org/groups/sig/asio/index.asp>). Especially check out the following tabs: *About Us, Sponsors, Historical Highlights, and Global Resources*. The 'Historical highlights' tab is a live section and will be updated when more information is available. The purpose of this section is really to compile the historical archives which can be an inspiration and guiding lamp for next generation ASIO leaders and members. And of course, this is also our tribute to all the founding members of ASIO! If you have any anecdotes and pictures from early days of ASIO, please send those to us.
- **Webinar** for visa related questions (see details Page 08)
- **Virtual coffee hour.** Every year at SOT annual meeting ASIO holds Coffee Hour mentoring session. Although this year we could not do this event in person, we don't want our mentees to miss an opportunity to connect with the mentors. Hence, we are going to hold this event as virtual. More details can be found on Page 07.
- **Trailblazers.** So many of us have inspiring career related stories to share or some of us might have taken a path which is less travelled, but hardly got a chance to share with colleagues. We plan to include a new section in ASIO Newsletter called "Trailblazers". If you noticed, I began this message with "ASIO Family". So please feel free to share your inspiring stories with this extended family or suggest the names if you know any such trailblazers.



President's Message

Vijay P. Kale, PhD, DABT, ERT
Amgen Inc.

Sept 2020 Newsletter

- An alliance with **ToxGurukul Foundation**, India. In order to connect with the toxicologists in India, we have formed an alliance with ToxGurukul Foundation (<https://toxgurukul.org/>). ToxGurukul has been actively involved in the education and training in toxicology, and mentoring activities for toxicologists in India. The ToxGurukul initiative is essentially trying to fill the vacuum in the toxicology education and training in India. This alliance opens the channel for the ASIO members to participate in the ongoing activities in the field of toxicology in India. If anyone is interested in connecting with ToxGurukul, let us know, we will be happy to do so.

All these initiatives are not possible without the dedicated volunteers. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of our volunteers who have and are executing the above initiatives. However, we need more volunteers to execute all these initiatives more efficiently. Hence, I would urge the members to volunteer some of their time for the benefits our ASIO family in large. If you are interested to volunteer in any of the ASIO committees (<https://www.toxicology.org/groups/sig/asio/committees.asp>), please write to me or any of the Executive Committee member.

Stay safe and Healthy!

United We Stand!

With warm regards,

Vijay P. Kale

“Individually we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean. “ ~Ryunosuke Satoro

2020-2021 ASIO Officers

Sept 2020 Newsletter

President

Vijay P. Kale, MVSc,
PhD, DABT, ERT
Amgen Inc.



Sr. Councilor

Vivek Lawana
American Preclinical
Services, LLC



Vice President

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Student Representative

Tarana Arman
Washington State University



Treasurer/Secretary

Vishakha S. Bhave, PhD
Exxat



“Brains, like hearts, go where they are appreciated. “ ~Robert McNamara

ASIO Award Nomination Committee

Sept 2020 Newsletter

This year the ASIO Executive Committee (EC) has started many new initiatives. One of them is the formation of **ASIO Award Nomination Committee**. There are many ASIO members who deserve due recognition for their significant contribution to the field of toxicology as a researcher as well as a mentor for the next generation of toxicologists. However, the number of ASIO members receiving the SOT awards over the years has been sporadic. The ASIO Executive Committee is happy to announce the formation of a new committee called ASIO Award Nomination Committee. The goal of the committee is to encourage the deserving candidates from ASIO membership to submit their nominations for various National SOT awards. This committee will act as a catalyst for ASIO members' award applications, except student and postdoc awards. The committee will help the potential candidates to choose most appropriate SOT awards and facilitate completion of the application requirements to meet the SOT award deadlines. ASIO EC is making all the efforts to form a robust committee. **We are still looking for volunteers on this committee.** *If you are interested to volunteer, please contact Jaya Chilakapati at Jaya.Chilakapati@boehringer-ingenelheim.com.*

ASIO EC is making all the efforts to form a robust committee. But to make this effort more fruitful, we are asking for your help. We also want to hunt for deserving candidates, who are ASIO members, for various SOT awards. If you know such ASIO members who truly deserve recognition for their work, please send their names, email and suggested SOT award for which they can be nominated to Jaya Chilakapati at (Jaya.Chilakapati@boehringer-ingenelheim.com). The list of SOT awards can be found here - <https://www.toxicology.org/awards/sot/awards.aspx>. We should mention here that the nominees also need to be willing to apply for the award and they must actively participate in the application process. As mentioned above, ASIO will encourage them to apply and act as a catalyst to facilitate their application and cannot nominate on their behalf. Since this is our first year for this committee, if there is a large pool of applicants, the committee will have to select few of them to nominate this year depending on the availability of number of volunteers we have on this Nomination Committee. However, remainder will be considered for nomination in the subsequent years.

“To be a champion, compete; to be a great champion, compete with the best; but to be the greatest champion, compete with yourself. “ ~Matshona Dhliwayo

Best Paper in Toxicology Award

Sept 2020 Newsletter

The “ASIO-SOT Best Paper” award is given to a peer-reviewed publication published by ASIO-SOT members. The purpose of this award is to recognize the outstanding research published by ASIO members. The award includes a plaque or a certificate. The award winner(s) will be determined by ASIO awards committee.

Award Eligibility Criteria:

- Must be an ASIO member (or have pending application for membership). If not a member yet, you can apply for ASIO membership throughout the year via the following link http://www.toxicology.org/groups/sig/asio/Docs/ASIO_Non-SOTMemberApplication.pdf. There is no SOT membership requirement. However, we strongly encourage applicants to apply for SOT membership, if they are not members currently.
- The applicant must be the first author (equal contribution first co-author is acceptable) or the last author on the paper submitted. If the applicant is the equal contribution first co-author, then the all first author(s) will be recognized as well. If the applicant is the last author, then the first author (and equal contribution first co-author) will be recognized as well.
- The original research article published (or accepted) in peer reviewed journal between August 1 to July 31 in the year preceding to the SOT meeting will be considered. For example, the papers published between August 1, 2019 to July 31, 2020 will be considered for evaluation for SOT 2021 annual meeting awards. Note: if the paper is accepted and not published, the letter of acceptance from journal editors is required.
- The publication should be focused on the fields of toxicology or related fields.

Submission Requirements:

A SINGLE PDF file containing following materials should be emailed to asioawards@gmail.com

- Section 1: A full citation of the accepted** or submitted paper.
- Section 2: A copy of the published paper. (**Note: In case of an accepted article, a copy of the official letter of acceptance from the journal must be included along with paper pre-print)
- *If nominee’s application is still pending, please provide their membership application as a separate attachment.

For any questions please contact ASIO Councilor Vivek Lawana.

“The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.” ~Steven Spielberg

Virtual Coffee Hour

Sept 2020 Newsletter



“Coffee Hour” is one of the successful initiatives to help the young minds and motivated mentees in the ASIO family.

This year, despite a great interest from both mentors and mentees, due to the cancellation of the SOT conference, Coffee Hour could not be scheduled.

However, in these unprecedented times, we want to keep this resourceful initiative unceasingly live. Therefore, we are truly excited and happy to organize a virtual coffee hour session this year. Our role is to connect the interested mentors and the mentees and provide them with a suitable and supportive virtual platform to speak and share their experiences with each other. We hope this positive effort from our side will be a timely impetus and help all of you advance in your career.

Details to follow soon on the ASIO Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ASIOSOT1>) and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12095915/>).

Stay Tuned!!

“It's through curiosity and looking at opportunities in new ways that we've always mapped our path.” ~Michael Dell

ASIO Webinar on US Visas

Sept 2020 Newsletter

Are you a student on F1 or F1-OPT, or a postdoc on H1 or J1 visa?
Are you in academia or industry on H1B or O1 visas?
Are you in the middle of your OPT?
Are you wondering about your options to continue working and building your career in USA?

For all the above questions and more, ASIO brings before you an informational webinar on the changing landscape of visa policies and what it means for you. Listen in on the current work-based visa options from a reputed immigration law firm attorney and what changes to expect moving forward so you can plan your career moves in the best possible way.

Endorsed by Toxicologists of African Origin (TAO), Korean Toxicologists Association in America (KTAA), Hispanic Organization of Toxicologists (HOT) American Association of Chinese in Toxicology (AACT) Special Interest Groups.

Title: The visa marathon: How to navigate your way through the changing landscape of visa opportunities in the USA

Speakers:

- a) Anna Stepanova, Asst. Managing Attorney & Member, Murthy Law Firm
- b) Khorzad Mehta, Attorney, Murthy Law Firm

Date: September 24, 2020

Time: 12:00pm-1:00pm EST

Duration: 1hour (45min + 15min Q&A)

Registration Link: <https://aim-hq.webex.com/aim-hq/onstage/g.php?MTID=e3b055ffc62294b9ed33777e2231ec4b4>

Mark your calendars by registering for this webinar by September 23, 2020.

About our speakers



Anna Stepanova
Asst. Managing Attorney/Member
Murthy Law Firm

Anna Stepanova is an Assistant Managing Attorney and a member of the Murthy Law Firm. She represents companies and individuals before the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of State (DOS), and various other government agencies with regard to both immigrant and non-immigrant employment and family-based applications and petitions. More specifically, Ms. Stepanova handles administrative motions and appeals of denial decisions in complex employment and family based petitions and applications; analysis of criminal records to determine their effect on clients' eligibility for immigration benefits; immigrant and non-immigrant waivers of inadmissibility submitted at U.S. Consulates abroad and at USCIS from within the U.S.; immigrant petitions for people with Extraordinary Ability, Outstanding Professors and Researchers, and those whose work is in the national interest to the U.S.; Nunc Pro Tunc petitions and applications requesting waivers of the late filing; and other miscellaneous matters including F-1 student and J-1 exchange visitor visas.



Khorzad Mehta
Attorney
Murthy Law Firm

After earning his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from The Ohio State University, Khorzad earned his law degree from Case Western Reserve University School of Law. In law school, he participated in the Immigration Law Clinic to assist noncitizens seeking asylum and refugee status in the United States. Khorzad represents individuals, families and U.S. employers with employment- and family-based immigrant and nonimmigrant visa matters. He has a special interest in the representation of international physicians and their employers with J-1 waivers to improve access to health care for the rural, semi-rural, and low income populations of the United States, H and O nonimmigrant petitions, labor certifications, and National Interest Waivers and Extraordinary Ability based immigrant petitions. Khorzad is an active member of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA). He has been invited to speak at immigration lawyers' conferences nationwide and has served on government liaison committees at both the local and national levels.

Disclaimer: This webinar will not provide any legal advice but will merely be an informative session. SOT or ASIO will NOT be responsible for any legal decisions made by the attendees.

“There are always new, grander challenges to confront, and a true winner will embrace each one.” ~Mia Hamm

2020 ASIO-SOT Awards

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Dr. Dharm Singh Postdoctoral Fellow Best Abstract Awards

- **Niyati Vaccharajani**, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- **Milan Prajapati**, Brown University

Dr. Harihara Mehendale Graduate Student Best Abstract Awards

- **Archit Rastogi**, University of Massachusetts, Amherst
- **Dharmin Rokad**, Iowa State University
- **Prathyusha Bagam**, Southern University A&M College

Dr. Laxman Desai Graduate Student Best Abstract Awards

- **Durgesh Kumar Dwivedi**, National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER)
- **Isha Mhatre**, Northeast Ohio Medical University

Toxikon, a Preclinical Toxicology Organization; and Dr. Dharm Singh International Travel Award

- **Snigdha Gupta**, Indian Institute of Toxicology Research CSIR
- **Vidya Chandrasekaran**, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

ASIO Young Investigator Award

- **Mayur S. Mitra**, B. Pharm, PhD, DABT, Senior Scientist, Genentech

ASIO Senior Toxicologist Award

- **Satheesh Anand**, PhD, DABT, Principal Scientist, Boehringer Ingelheim



“Everything is theoretically impossible, until it is done.” – Robert A. Heinlein.

59th Annual Meeting
& TOXEXPO • March 15–19, 2020
Anaheim, California

Winner's Words

Sept 2020 Newsletter

What does this award mean to you?

This award provides immense support in my ongoing research and it is a great recognition to my work and career. It provides great deal of confidence and momentum in realizing my goals in research career.

Can you please elaborate on your work (from the abstract) and its practical applications?

My current work is focused on environmental metal toxicant manganese in neurodegenerative diseases, mainly Parkinson's disease. More specifically my work focuses on molecular pathway and key proteins which regulates misfolded protein release in extracellular environment through small scale vehicles. Based on our results we found certain proteins which can be targeted for developing therapeutical agents to reduce and potentially stop the spread of neurodegeneration in various regions of brain following manganese toxicity.

How has this award and attendance to the ASIO meeting help in your project and/or career development? Please state 3 points on what networking opportunities you are looking with ASIO.

I have been regular attendee of SOT and ASIO. This award and attendance to ASIO meeting helps me enormously in my project/ career as this is one of the big recognitions for a graduate student like me in realizing his own capabilities and strengths.

I am looking for networking opportunities with people from

- Industry personnel
- Government personnel
- Research consultants



Dharmin Rokad
Iowa State University

Dr. Harihara Mehendale
Graduate Student Best
Abstract Awards

What according to you makes an award-winning abstract?

Clarity in research goals, systematic methods applications, defined and clear results that supports your hypothesis with scientific yet easy to follow explanation is an award winning abstract according to me.



“Without labor, nothing prospers.” – Sophocles.

59th Annual Meeting
& TOXEXPO • March 15–19, 2020
Anaheim, California

Winner's Words

Sept 2020 Newsletter

What does this award mean to you?

I'm thrilled to have won this award! Science can often feel solitary and arduous, so it's great to receive recognition for your work from the broader scientific community.

Can you please elaborate on your work (from the abstract) and its practical applications?

My PhD research focused on identifying the impacts of prenatal exposures to toxicants on the developing pancreas. I found that key transcription factors are reprogrammed by early-life exposures, potentially altering an individual's ability to cope with stressors later in life.

How has this award and attendance to the ASIO meeting help in your project and/or career development? Please state 3 points on what networking opportunities you are looking with ASIO.

By defraying the cost of attending SOT, this award helped me network with various scientists at different stages of their career. This has proven to be an invaluable learning opportunity over the years.



Archit Rastogi

**University of
Massachusetts, Amherst**

**Dr. Harihara Mehendale
Graduate Student Best
Abstract Awards**

What according to you makes an award-winning abstract?

I really can't speak to this broadly, but, I imagine the judges screen abstracts based on scientific content, translational impact and clarity of writing.



Winner's Words

Sept 2020 Newsletter

What does this award mean to you?

I am a recipient of reputed 'Dr. Laxman S. Desai Graduate Student Best Abstract Award'. After getting this award, everyone in my institute has appreciated my efforts in conducting research work during Ph.D. As of now, I have submitted my thesis and applying for the position of Post-Doctoral Research Associate in the well reputed labs around the globe and I am expecting that I will get a preference over other applicants applying for the same position.

Can you please elaborate on your work (from the abstract) and its practical applications?

I have presented the research work entitled as 'The Intervention of NLRP3 Inhibitor and Nrf2 Activator Protects against Diethyl Nitrosamine and Thioacetamide-Induced Hepatic Precarcinogenesis in Rats'. My research involves elucidating the mechanism of liver early liver carcinogenesis in rats induced by liver toxicants. Especially involving the role of anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory signaling in counteracting these toxicities. In a nutshell, drugs that either reduce the inflammatory condition or increase the anti-oxidant status, deserve further attention for the development of new drugs to treat liver disorders following the same mechanism.

How has this award and attendance to the ASIO meeting help in your project and/or career development? Please state 3 points on what networking opportunities you are looking with ASIO.

Unfortunately, due to the cancellation of meeting, I was not able to interact with the eminent personalities and esteemed experts, who are ASIO members. In the ASIO meetings such as career talk with toxpers, coffee hours as well as in the reception, I have planned to learn more about the Toxicology and also to look for the opportunity in early my carrier.



Durgesh Dwivedi

National Institute of
Pharmaceutical Education
& Research

Dr. Harihara Mehendale Graduate Student Best Abstract Awards

What according to you makes an award-winning abstract?

I think it was due to novelty in the model designing, selection and exploration of molecular targets involved in the progression of early carcinogenesis as well as the exploration of molecular mechanism involved amelioration after intervening the agents



“Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs.” – Henry Ford.

59th Annual Meeting
& TOXEXPO • March 15–19, 2020
Anaheim, California

Winner's Words

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What does this award mean to you?

I was really excited and grateful when I learned that I was the recipient of this award. I was overwhelmed as ASIO has chosen my abstract, it gives me immense strength to pursue my further research. I would take this opportunity to thank all the judges and members of jury.

Can you please elaborate on your work (from the abstract) and its practical applications?

I work in the field of Pulmonary Immunotoxicity with focus on Inhalation Toxicology. In brief, I am interested in determining the effect of cigarette smoke (active and passive smoking) on the mechanism(s) associated with protein homeostasis. To be more specific, my project focuses to determine the molecular mechanisms associated with the regulation of autophagy mechanism during cigarette smoke exposure using secondhand smoke exposed murine model and in vitro. Autophagy plays a critical role in maintaining cellular homeostasis under stress conditions and our goal is to unravel the critical players of this phenomenon which could be targeted for the development of better therapeutic strategies for pulmonary disorders resulting from smoke exposure. Since not much is known about the pathophysiology of COPD, this could be an interesting pursuit as it might provide answers to the regulators of inflammatory responses as well during exposure to cigarette smoke.

Specific aims of my research project involved - a) To study cigarette Smoke mediated regulation of autophagy through FOXO transcription factors in cell model. FOXO transcription factors have been known to regulate the mechanism of autophagy in living systems. However, the exact mechanism of this regulation remains unknown. Our investigations have shown dysregulated production of two major members of this protein family – FOXO1 and FOXO3- in response to smoke challenge. Furthermore, using techniques like gene knockdown and gene overexpression, we have demonstrated the potential of these proteins to regulate the downstream expression of autophagy related genes. This is very exciting as it provides us with a snapshot of the molecular events that are triggered on smoke exposure and that lead to increased autophagy in the cells.



Prathyusha Bagam
Southern University A&M College
Dr. Harihara Mehendale
Graduate Student Best
Abstract Award

What according to you makes an award-winning abstract?

Scope of the project, necessity, and potentiality of research.

How has this award and attendance to the ASIO meeting help in your project and/or career development? Please state 3 points on what networking opportunities you are looking with ASIO.

As, a graduate student this award actually helped me gaining exposure across the SOT's scientific community and provided a platform to enlarge my professional network.

I would like to know eminent toxicologists working around US, their contact information, so I can approach them for my future opportunities.

To provide a common platform where everyone can share their work and possible knowledge.

“If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes, then learn how to do it. “ ~Richard Branson

ASIO congratulates

Sept 2020 Newsletter

ASIO member	Achievements
<p>Avinash Kumar, PhD Louisiana State University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award 1: Received Mechanisms SS Gabriel L. Plaa Education Award 2020 (3rd place) in April 2020. • Award 2: Received Allegheny Erie Society of Toxicology Postdoctoral Travel Award in February 2020. • Job Change: Joined as a research associate in Louisiana State University starting from June 2020.
<p>Durgesh Kumar Dwivedi, MS (Pharm.) National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) S.A.S. Nagar, India</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Award 1: Received Dr. Laxman S. Desai Graduate Student Best Abstract Award by the ASIO-SOT in March 2020. • Award 2: Received Perry J. Gehring Award for the Student by the RASS-SOT in March 2020 and also presented the abstract virtually in 'RASS Virtual Award Ceremony' • Award 3: Received 'Graduate Student Travel Award by SOT in March 2020 • Publications: Co-authored two publications, one in each 'Journal of Biochemical and Molecular Toxicology' and 'Psychopharmacology'
<p>Gurjot Kaur, PhD, Shoolini University Solan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant 1: COVID-19 HPC Consortium project MCB200120, “Assessment of phytochemicals present in Indian indigenous plants through in silico methods for CoVID19 targeting and treatment” • Grant 2: SOT Undergraduate Faculty Research Grant on microplastics contamination • Publication 1: Scientometric analysis: identification of research trends for ozone as an air pollutant for 2011-2019. Sharma AK, Kaur G. Environ Sci Pollut Res Int. 2020 Jul 4. doi: 10.1007/s11356-020-09941-4. PMID: 32623671 • Publication 2: Herb-drug interactions: a mechanistic approach. Sharma AK, Kapoor VK, Kaur G. Drug Chem Toxicol. 2020 Mar 12:1-10. doi: 10.1080/01480545.2020.1738454. PMID: 32160796 • Book Chapter; Nutraceuticals in Dermal diseases by Gurjot Kaur (Senior Author), Vijay K. Kapoor, Poonam Negi in Gupta - Nutraceuticals, Second Edition • Membership: Full member of SOT starting 2020

“If you really look closely, most overnight successes took a long time. “ ~Steve Jobs

ASIO congratulates

Sept 2020 Newsletter

ASIO member	Achievements
Krishna P Maremanda, PhD Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard medical School.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First place (Our team) in the online Sciathon 2020 project conducted by Lindau Nobel laureate Meetings, Germany, from 19-21 June, 2020. The team was awarded with certificates and a cash prize.
Sairam Bellum, MVSc, PhD, DABT, Merck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OTSS Best Poster Award, SOT, March 2020
Sharmilee P. Sawant, PhD DABT, RAC BD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job change: Senior manager, Toxicology, Corporate Preclinical Development and toxicology, BD
Rashmi Pathak, PhD Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judge in Louisiana Region VII Science and Engineering Fair (Senior Division): Judged nine research projects falling under the categories a) Biochemistry and b) Cellular and Molecular Biology; Feb 2020 Mentor at Freedom Employability Academy (FEA) (https://feaindia.org/) – Have been mentoring a diverse group of students (undergraduate, postgraduate and working). Conducted several sessions on personality development, career avenues, mental health awareness and COVID19 to name a few; Jan2020-Present
Tarana Arman Washington State University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding Graduate Student Leadership Award sponsored by the SOT Graduate Student leadership Committee (GSLC)

“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning. “ ~Benjamin Franklin

ASIO congratulates

Sept 2020 Newsletter

ASIO member	Achievements
Vijay Kale, MVSc, PhD, DABT, ERT Amgen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joined Amgen Inc at South San Francisco, CA• Publication 1: Old drugs, new uses: Drug repurposing in hematological malignancies. Semin Cancer Biol. 2020 Mar 6; S1044-579X(20)30063-8. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32151704/• Publication 2: Evaluation of chronic toxicity of cyclocreatine, a creatine analog, in Sprague Dawley rat after oral gavage administration for up to 26 weeks. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32745584/• Publication 3. Edited a book titled "Advances in Cancer Signal Transduction and Therapy" by Bentham Publications (https://benthambooks.com/book/9789811458118/)• Mentoring 1: Ongoing mentoring activities to rural government schools (Zilla Parishad) in Maharashtra as a part of GlobalNagari Foundation's initiative (https://globalnagari.org/)• Mentoring 2: Delivered a webinar talk on "Careers in biotech and drug development" to Half Moon Bay High school (Bay Area, California) students in May 2020 as a part of Amgen Biotech Experience (https://www.amgenbiotechexperience.com/).



Dialogue with Dr. Gurjot Kaur

Interviewed by Tarana Arman

Sept 2020 Newsletter

Dr. Gurjot Kaur completed her PhD in 2013 from the University of Innsbruck, Austria. There she worked with calcium channels in the heart. Soon she joined University of Konstanz, Germany as a Post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Neurobiology. However, the following year in 2014, she switched to the Department of Human and Environmental Toxicology in the same university. There she proceeded to work for three years until she received an Associate Professor position in Shoolini University, Solan, India.

Tarana: Gurjot, you did your PhD from University of Innsbruck in Austria, and your Postdoctoral training from University of Konstanz, Germany....

Gurjot corrected me that it was two postdocs. She then further continued

Gurjot: I started my postdoc in Developmental Neurobiology, which I tried for one and the half years and then I realized this is not working for me. To be honest, I was looking for something that I could follow as a faculty. And in my then postdoctoral training, despite having a lot of experience I could not find a research problem that I wanted to pursue further.

Meanwhile I bumped into my second postdoc supervisor Dr. Dietrich, he is a toxicologist. And the meeting with him just clicked right with me. I loved the research topic and I also realized that I had all the tools: Experimental, Physical and Mental.

She further added, after three years of experience as a postdoc in Toxicology, I am so much confident of all the things I know.

Tarana: How was your transition to toxicology? Was it hard?

Gurjot: I have not had a straight career path. But I also never let any opportunities slip by. So I started my PhD, researching on calcium channels in the heart. Then I moved on to neurobiology because I was always interested in learning about the brain. Then I realized that I am not as excited as I thought I will be. In the meantime, I was in India and the pollution there made me think how much it affects me. That is when I came across the second postdoc opportunity and I grabbed the opportunity. I realized this is that perfect research opportunity I was looking for. If you are motivated by a research topic, I feel, you do not have to work extra hard. The work just gets done by itself because you are enjoying it so much. So, I already had the motivation. And after three years I realized I could not wait to put my ideas into practice.

Tarana: Why did you decide to go to Europe, was it a conscious decision?

Gurjot: I feel that I could have spent a little less time and reach my current position had I been more focused. When I did my Bachelor's,

Dialogue with Dr. Gurjot Kaur

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many of my batchmates were preparing for the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) entrance exam and I took the exam as well, and I was one of the three that got into NIPER. It was the only NIPER back then. And that is what I consider was the turning point in my career. I got a good research experience there, under my supervisor Dr. C.S. Dey. It was then I decided to go for a PhD. Although, I might not have had the focus from the beginning, I never left anything to chance. Once, I decide on a goal I always give my 100-200%. So, when I decided to pursue a PhD, I sent around 200 applications and only two people replied, one of whom was then my PhD supervisor. And when I had my interview with my PhD supervisor, I had to google about Austria. So, somehow, I feel it was not a conscious decision.

But I try to help my students to be more focused now, because times have changed and there is more competition.

Tarana: *What were you going through when you received all the rejections?*

Gurjot: I do not want to sound too ambitious, but, I never thought about these things too much. I am more work oriented. All I thought was, "These people do not know me, so there is a high chance they will not say yes. So, I will have to keep on doing this, till I get a yes". And I think at the early stage of your career you have to be like that, because you can't let yourself affected by every rejection.

Tarana: *Did you have a similar experience when looking for postdoctoral positions?*

Gurjot: By the time I had my PhD in Austria, I had several publications. And I had a recommendation from an international scientist. So, these factors helped me.

Tarana: *And how was transition from Germany to India?*

Gurjot: Some parts of this transition were easy because I was coming back to my homeland. I understood the people and the language. This was a bit hard for me in Germany. I tried to learn German, but it was not easy for me. And not knowing the language put a hindrance in my effective negotiation capabilities. And we sometimes do not realize that people are more connected to the language they speak.

But when it comes to equipment, yes, that is difficult. Because, suddenly you realize, you do not have everything. But to overcome that, you can collaborate heavily. Moreover, if you are not working in a National Laboratory here, you really must collaborate because you want to ensure that your students do not miss out any opportunities.

The last but not the least is the mental transition. In Germany, as a postdoc I was training one or two students every now and then. Now suddenly, I am a faculty who is always speaking to the students. That was and still is a challenge, as I must reshuffle my

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time between teaching, research, and my students. But my students are always my priority.

Tarana: *At what point did you decide to be an Academician?*

Gurjot: I never wanted to be in industry. The question for me was whether I wanted to be a teacher. In my personal life, I felt like a teacher. When I had my international ToxScholar Grant, I came to visit four institutes in India to teach students about Toxicology and I realized I want to guide students. This visit showed me four extremely good research institutes, including Shoolini. While at Shoolini, I somehow knew that this is where I will be coming back to.

Tarana: *Who are some of your mentors both personally and professionally?*

Gurjot: That is a great question, **she beamed.**

I have always tried to be in touch with all my professors. I am still in contact with my master's supervisor Dr. C.S. Dey. I was flying to Austria for the first time for my interview and he gave me a pep talk before that. He is a great guy and a great scientist, and I would love to collaborate with him someday. And then from my PhD, I have two mentors. One of them is a female scientist. At the start of my career, I did not realize that having female scientists as a mentor is important, because we see that most of the scientists who are successful are males. And we feel that they can teach us everything.

But, as time passed, I realized that there are certain questions a male scientist cannot answer, and it is important to have female mentors as well. I realized this during my postdoc when I started heavily going to conferences like SOT and sell myself as an early career researcher. And now as a faculty, I realize the importance even more. I am a part of this group called Graduate Women in Science (GWIS), and we have a WhatsApp group, where we talk to each other and discuss collaborations.

Another important thing that I realized is that you cannot have one single person as your mentor and as your sponsor. Sometimes the time availability might be a problem for them if they are traveling. So, I would suggest having at least 10 mentors that you can go and talk to. The other thing one should also see to is that, you will have to find people who are willing to talk to you about the things you want.

One more realization that I had was that, once I started taking steps for myself, people wanted to be my mentors. They saw me making my own decisions, my mentors saw that and wanted to support me.

Tarana: *So how did you approach someone to be your mentor at the start of your career?*

Gurjot: I would say that just go ahead and talk to scientists. These conferences that we go to are very important. When you go and speak to a scientist, you will know right away

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if they are interested to be your mentor. They will often be very interested in what you had to share, and they will also ask you to write back to them. Often you will also notice that they might reach to certain part of your question in a positive manner. And you can deduce that this person can be a mentor for this sort of problem.

Tarana: *Are there any struggles that you have faced as a new faculty?*

Gurjot: I do not like to think about most of the things as struggle, because if you are motivated to make it as faculty and a researcher, you will have to be up for every challenge. But, if I may have to speak about struggle, it will have to be time management. Sometimes, I really want to balance my life out and if I decide to stop my work at sharp 6 p.m., but then, I have so much workload the next morning. I do not think this struggle is going to go away any time soon. That is why I applied for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity (NCFDD) grant. This grant taught me a lot of things: how to manage my time. How to look at time as an expendable unit and the ways to reduce the stress levels. Last year was very hard for me because I did not have a grant and a publication of my own. But time has turned, now I have two grants, I completely appreciate the struggles and now I feel more prepared to help other early career scientists.

There is value to both big and small grants and I will recommend to not stick to only big grants.

My other struggles is that my students are working so hard; how do I give them some time free. I try to give them the Saturday and Sunday off every week. This is important, otherwise, Indian students are not taught about work-life balance.

But what I am missing the most right now is having conversations with my mentors. Teaching and research have consumed most of my time and I do not have time to do online video calls, especially with my mentors who are abroad.

One good thing that has come from all of this, is that I have published two articles as the corresponding author. I realized that I can now take the responsibility of an article and structure it in a way that a journal will publish it.

Tarana: *How many students do you have currently working with you?*

Gurjot: I have two PhD students: one of them is working on microplastics and the other student will start working on Covid-19. I had two master's students who graduated and two that joined this year. And I have six undergraduates. Not a lot of people realize the potential of undergrads, but I have some undergraduates who are brilliant.

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Tarana: *How do you keep yourself motivated every day, and any other final parting comments?*

Gurjot: I always try to remind myself of the bigger picture. And to do that I meditate (in a way) every day. Every morning I close my eyes and plan out my day. I try to calm myself down if I had a fight with anyone. Somedays, I might feel lazy, I might not be doing enough writing. And meditation helps me to bring back the balance.

As a final comment to anyone who is trying to decide on an industry versus an academic career, I will like to tell them, what I tell my students. Why don't you try both the sides? Get internships and gauge what you like better. So, try to diversify your experience as much as possible.

Here is the link to Dr. Kaur's lab website. Do look it up and get to know more about all the exciting research her lab is doing:
<https://motivatedscientist.wordpress.com/author/gurjotkaurbains/>

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Dr. Laxman Desai and Toxikon



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