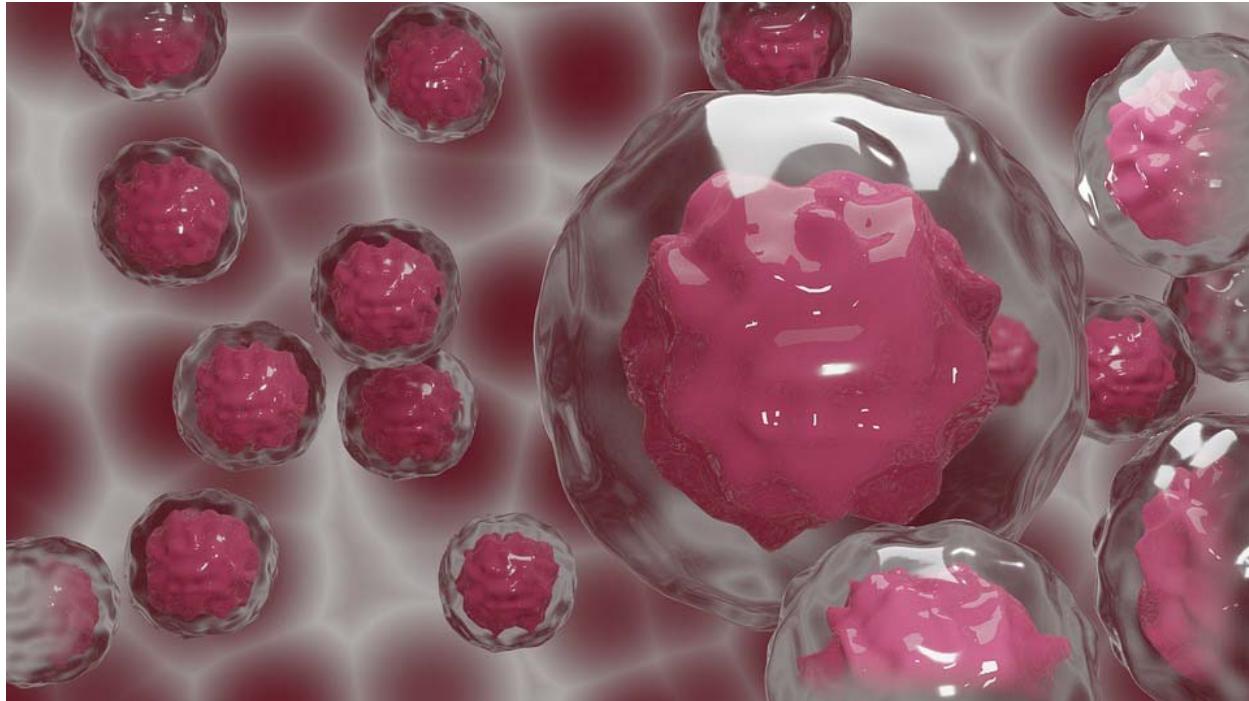


## SOT Stem Cell Specialty Section

# SCSS Newsletter

April 25th, 2020



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**In this newsletter, you will find:**

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## 1. Message from the outgoing President

It has been quite a chaotic last few months, to say the least, and we hope that this message finds you, your family, and your friends safe and sound. One (out of many) unfortunate consequence of the spread of SARS-CoV-2 is the cancellation of the annual meeting of the Society of Toxicology and therefore of our reception. Thanks to the incredible generosity of our sponsors, we were nonetheless able to award 4 Research Excellence awards to young trainees, graduate students and fellows, who were to be featured at the reception. Sadly, we will not be able to celebrate our trainees nor thank our sponsors in person but this is why this newsletter is so important: each of the 4 awardees has written a message to the SCSS community that is presented below. Please virtually join me in congratulating them and in thanking our sponsors, also featured below, for their generosity. We hope to see you next year at SOT and that you stay safe in the meantime!



Dr. Patrick Allard.

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## 2. Honoring our award winners and our sponsors

This year, we had the pleasure of honoring 4 trainees for their excellence in research. The vast pool of candidates made it for a particularly competitive process and a difficult process for the judges! We are therefore pleased to honor 2 graduate students: **Tasha Thong** (1st place) and **Kendra Prutton** (2nd place) and 2 post-doctoral fellows: Dr. **Nicole Sparks** (shared 1st place) and Dr. **Souvarish Sarkar** (shared 1st place). We were only able to give out this number of awards thanks to the remarkable generosity of our sponsors. This year, our sponsors (in alphabetical order) were: **Axion Biosystems, Inc**; **Neucyte**; and **Stemcell Technologies, Inc**. Please read on for our awardees feature!

## **Tasha Thong**

*Ph.D. student, University of Michigan*

My name is Tasha Thong, I'm a second year PhD candidate in Toxicology at the University of Michigan. My research is focused on uncovering the biological basis for racial disparities in breast cancer by exploring the relationship between normal mammary stem cells, genetics, and environmental exposures. By using an interdisciplinary combination of *ex vivo* cell culture, single-cell transcriptomics, and population level biomarker analyses, we hope to achieve the long-term goals of reducing breast cancer disparities, incidence, and the development of better targeted therapies. I believe that this is a pressing public health and environmental justice issue because the striking racial disparities in breast cancer have been known for decades, yet today there is still little known about their biological basis. It is really exciting and encouraging to receive this award and to know that there are other like minded researchers who find this work meaningful and find single-cell transcriptomics as cool as I do!



## **Kendra Prutton**

*Ph.D. student, Colorado Anschutz Medical School*

My name is Kendra Prutton, and I am a second year PhD student studying Toxicology at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus in the laboratory of Dr. James Roede. Down syndrome (DS) is the most common genetic form of intellectual disability; however, the severity of DS cognition remains highly variable and poorly understood. Despite persistent efforts to determine the effect of environmental toxicants on the developing brain, environmental involvement in DS cognition is not studied. My research focuses on the effect of trisomy 21 and pesticide exposure on directed neural differentiation of induced pluripotent stem cells. As a new member, it is an honor to receive the Excellence in Research Award from the Stem Cell Specialty Section.



## **Nicole Sparks**

*Post-doctoral Fellow - UC Riverside*

My name is Nicole Sparks and I am a UC Chancellor's Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of California, Riverside. My research pertains to the adverse effects of environmental toxicants on the cell fate of human embryonic stem cells and their differentiation into osteoblasts—the bone forming cells. This research uncovered transcriptions factors and microRNAs, necessary for proper bone differentiation, that were negatively impacted by environmental toxicant exposure, potentially uncovering an underlying mechanism of toxicant-mediated birth defects and new approaches towards diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of skeletal anomalies. Thank you to the SOT SCSS for recognizing my research and awarding me the travel award. This award supports my efforts in contributing high quality research and innovative methodologies toward the field of toxicology.



## **Souvarish Sarkar**

*Research Fellow, Harvard Medical School.*

I am working on developing a multiplex system for studying gene-environment interactions in Parkinson's disease using the *Drosophila* model and induced pluripotent stem cell-derived neurons. I was pleasantly surprised to be selected for the stem cell specialty section research award as this was my first time working with stem cells and applying for this award. This will help me pursue my goal of becoming an independent scientist and validate the importance of my work.



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### 3. Finance and budget summary

It has been an unusual year and with the reception being cancelled, our main expense has been the four aforementioned awards. We are therefore carrying a positive balance of \$3038. The leadership will decide as to how best invest this surplus to maximize the impact of our specialty section while recognizing the latent of our trainees .

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### 4. SCSS-sponsored virtual sessions and 2021 session proposals

The 2020 meeting was scheduled to feature 3 sessions sponsored or co-sponsored by the Stem-Cell Specialty Section. Please note that the following session is still scheduled to take place, albeit virtually: "Single-Cell Technologies: A Potentially Transformative Tool for Toxicology". Thursday, May 28th, 12-2:45pm (ET). To register, click [here](#).

The 2021 proposal submission period is currently open. The deadline is June 12, 2020, 11:59 pm (ET). Please let us know if you are interested in developing a proposal centered around Stem Cells! Our specialty section can advise you on building a strong session proposal. For the link to the SOT Proposal Submission Site and other details related to proposal submission, visit the ["Submitting Proposals"](#) web page.

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### 5. Election results and incoming President's message

Congratulations to our newly elected officers. Please make sure to congratulate them!

Vice  
President-Elect  
Petra Haberzettl



Secretary/  
Treasurer  
Lauren Lewis



Councilor  
Nicole I. zur  
Nieden



Post-doctoral  
Representative  
Nicole Sparks



Student  
Representative  
Ayeshia Morris



We would also like to recognize the incredible work of our exiting Secretary/Treasurer **Fang Liu** as well as of **Tim O'Toole** who served as President in 2018/2019 and then as Past-President 2019/2020 and is now leaving us! **Patrick Allard** will now serve as past-President while **Mike Clements** is our incoming President. Please find below a welcome message from Mike:

"Dear Stem Cells Specialty Section members,

My name is Mike Clements and I am the Stem Cell Specialty Section (SCSS) President for 2020-21. If our paths haven't crossed yet, I look forward to meeting you in the coming year.

I would like to begin by thanking Patrick for all his hard work over the last year. We had a great program organized for the 2020 SOT Annual Meeting which unfortunately we were unable to share with you. Congratulations again to our 2020 award winners, Nicole Sparks and Souvarish Sarkar for their post-doctoral research excellence and travel awards, and Tasha Thong and Kendra Prutton for their graduate student research excellence and travel awards.



I'm sure you will agree that application of stem cells and their derived models is one of the most exciting and promising research areas in toxicology. It's our goal to ensure that the SCSS remains an active forum for us to share ideas and champion our field.

On that note, if you would like to play a more active role in the SCSS, or have ideas about how we can better serve the stem cell community within SOT, I would encourage you to contact me via email to discuss this further ([mclements@axionbio.com](mailto:mclements@axionbio.com)).

I look forward to working with you all to help build another exciting program for 2021 SOT in Orlando, Florida.

All the best,

Mike"

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We hope to see you all at the 2021 SOT annual meeting in Florida. Stay safe!