Highlights from Scientific Sessions 2012

Reflection on a successful Scientific Sessions 2012, I am looking forward to a productive year for the FGTB Council. Here are a few highlights:

Early Career Day
The FGTB Early Career Committee planned the Scientific Sessions 2012 Early Career breakout session, comprising an early afternoon education session, in which ECC members gave short talks outlining methodologies in functional genomics and translational biology, and a late afternoon “Hottest of the Hot” session, featuring four lectures from investigators recognized by our Council as contributors to some of the Top 10 Research Advances in FGTB for 2011. The talks were well attended and marked the third year FGTB has organized this session.

Young Investigator Award Competition
The FGTB Council sponsored its fourth annual Young Investigator Award Competition, with excellent presentations by the four finalists:

• Panjali Arora, MD, spoke about his work to determine the function of a genetic variant regulating ANP levels.
• Lee Roberts, PhD, highlighted his work on the identification of metabolites involved in the “browning” of white fat.
• Deepak Vora, MD, addressed his work to develop a roadmap to predict the ability of stem cells to differentiate into cardiomyocytes.
• Almudena Martinez-Fernandez, PhD, spoke about her work to develop a bioreactor to study the effects of high glucose concentration on stem cell differentiation.

Award Winners
Congratulations to Council members Dan Roden, MD, FAHA, and Daniel Rader, MD, FAHA, on their election to the FGTB Young Investigator Award Panel.

New FAHAs
The following new FAHAs were elected to the status of FAHA:

• Giulio Agnelli, PhD, FAHA
• Donna Amstutz, BSN, PhD, FAHA
• Josef Bartanek, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Asa Patrak, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Bongsoo Bae, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Su-jeong Moon, MD, FAHA
• Frank Hesse, MD, FAHA
• Edmund Kabagambe, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Judy Schatz, MD, FAHA
• Wei Xia, MD, FAHA
• Andre Terzic, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Daniel Rader, MD, PhD, FAHA
• Christina Wassel, PhD, FAHA

Top 10 Research Advances of 2012
The Early Career Committee organized a panel to nominate and vote on the top 10 FGTB research advances of the year. You can read about these advances in the February 2013 issue of Circulation: Cardiovascular Genetics.

Professional Online Network
The FGTB Group on the Professional Online Network (networking.americanheart.org/groups/home/17) is growing by leaps and bounds. It has highly informative and relevant content for people interested in FGTB topics and activities, including our podcast series and a newly launched educational initiative on genomics/omics literacy.

Q&A with Gordon Tomaselli, MD, FAHA

Q: What is your biggest personal gain from being a member of the AHA?

A: Quite personally, it was the launch of my own investigative career. I started with an AHA fellowship grant in the late 1980s, and that is what really allowed me to get my scientific feet firmly on the ground. I was able to apply for a K08 award at the time, an NIH faculty transition award and then subsequently a principal investigator award from the NIH.

Q: You have been lucky to be funded for the past 25 years. I would argue that it were not for the AHA, that would not have happened. So that’s a key thing for me. The other key thing for me is that through the AHA I have been able to build a network of collaborators and colleagues that has been absolutely essential given where scientific funding currently stands, with mandates for funding big science, that is, science that requires addressing a question from multiple points of view and multiple methodologies.

Q: Looking back to when you were early in your career, what strategies worked for you that you would recommend to others? What do you wish you had known then, now that you know, also? Do the current low levels of national funding pose a threat to the development of the next generation of investigators?

A: For the first part, I think you are right. It’s a very difficult time, and the advice I give someone starting out in science is that you really do have to focus and make sure that you have the best mentors that you can possibly have in your area of interest, and that their interest is engaged in your career in a way that is constructive. That is usually the rule, and you need to avoid the exceptions.

Again, collaborative science and figuring out what your place is in that collaborative science is important in getting funding. For those who are clinicians as well as scientists, really devoting the lion’s share of your time to research is important. In fact, it really does have the potential to be completely undermined should the research program go away. Just think about what happens in universities, how a lot of that gets funded by the investigation that goes on and the teaching that goes on around investigators. So it is a big problem not only economically, it is a big problem for the future of scientific research because we could lose a whole generation of investigators if we continue down this track.

Interview conducted in July 2012 by Giulio Agnelli, PhD, FAHA, an Early Career member of the FGTB Council. This transcript was excepted from the podcast of the full-length interview. Visit the FGTB Group on the AHA Professional Online Network to listen to the complete podcast.

Mark Your Calendar for Future Scientific Sessions

Scientific Sessions 2013
Nov. 16-20
Dallas

Scientific Sessions 2014
Nov. 15-19
Chicago