



SMA Europe meets Early Career Researchers

Overview

SMA Europe is organising an international event geared towards fostering the relationship between early career researchers (ECRs) and Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) patient advocates. This will be a unique opportunity for ECRs to engage with the broader SMA community and to bridge the gap between their laboratory work and the lived experiences of the condition they are working on. Twenty to forty participants consisting of ECRs and SMA advocates will be invited to meet in Ghent, Belgium on 13/03/2023 afternoon. The event will take place on the day before the start of the flagship [SMA Europe Scientific Congress](#).

Now more than ever, scientists and people living with SMA need a two-way communication avenue to ensure that research on SMA continues and does so with patient relevance and scientific talent retention at its heart. The event will allow ECRs to share and reflect on their research with their primary non-scientific audience, gaining crucial skills for their future career. The input from SMA advocates will help ECRs to design impactful research projects and foster mutual understanding and collaborations.

For SMA advocates, it will be an opportunity to gain an insight into cutting-edge fundamental and preclinical research and form relationships with the future experts in the field. Ultimately, understanding the current research landscape will give them tools and arguments for lobbying policymakers and health organisations for sustained research funding and improved therapeutic strategies.

The outputs and feedback from the day will be used to inform a workshop at the main scientific congress. SMA Europe, together with the ECRs and patient advocates, will identify the best science communication strategies to inform their research awareness campaign due to take place later in 2024.

Details of the event

The event will consist of a series of carefully designed group activities moderated by the organising committee: SMA Europe's research management team, two SMA delegates, and a 'junior' scientific advisory board of final year PhD students from the SMA BEYOND EU-funded research consortium. The committee will select ECRs for the event based on lay (non-specialist) abstract submissions.

Successful ECRs will receive guidance on creating a lay flash talk about their research and will also be asked to select a research article they consider to be of high impact in the field. In parallel, SMA advocates invited to attend by SMA Europe will be asked to identify important publications from their perspective (e.g., policy reports, clinical trial results, impactful examples of science communication). The discussion will be informed throughout by the recent Priority Setting Project undertaken by SMA Europe to identify the top research questions for the community.



Activities on the day will include themed roundtables, flash talks, and a quiz. These activities will help meet the objectives of the event, providing an informal and friendly environment for ECRs to grasp the importance of their work beyond the lab and inspire them, and for SMA delegates to add knowledge and new relations to their advocacy toolkit and be engaged with cutting-edge research.

We look forward to meeting you in Ghent!

The organising committee,

Anna Motyl, Vanessa Christie-Brown, Véronique Van Assche, and Thomas Koed Doktor