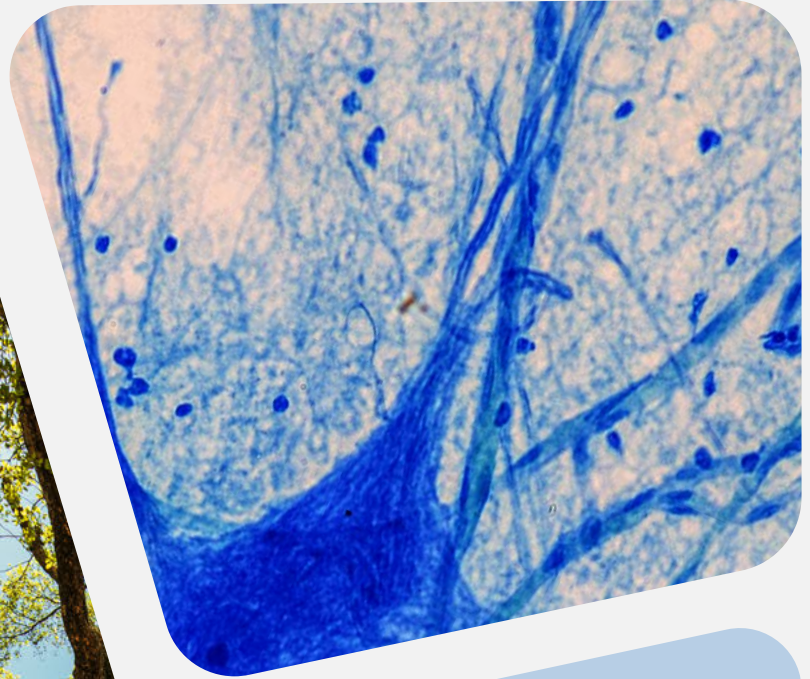




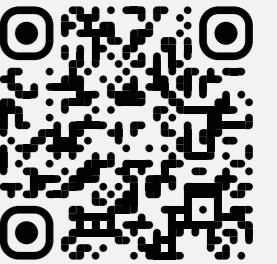
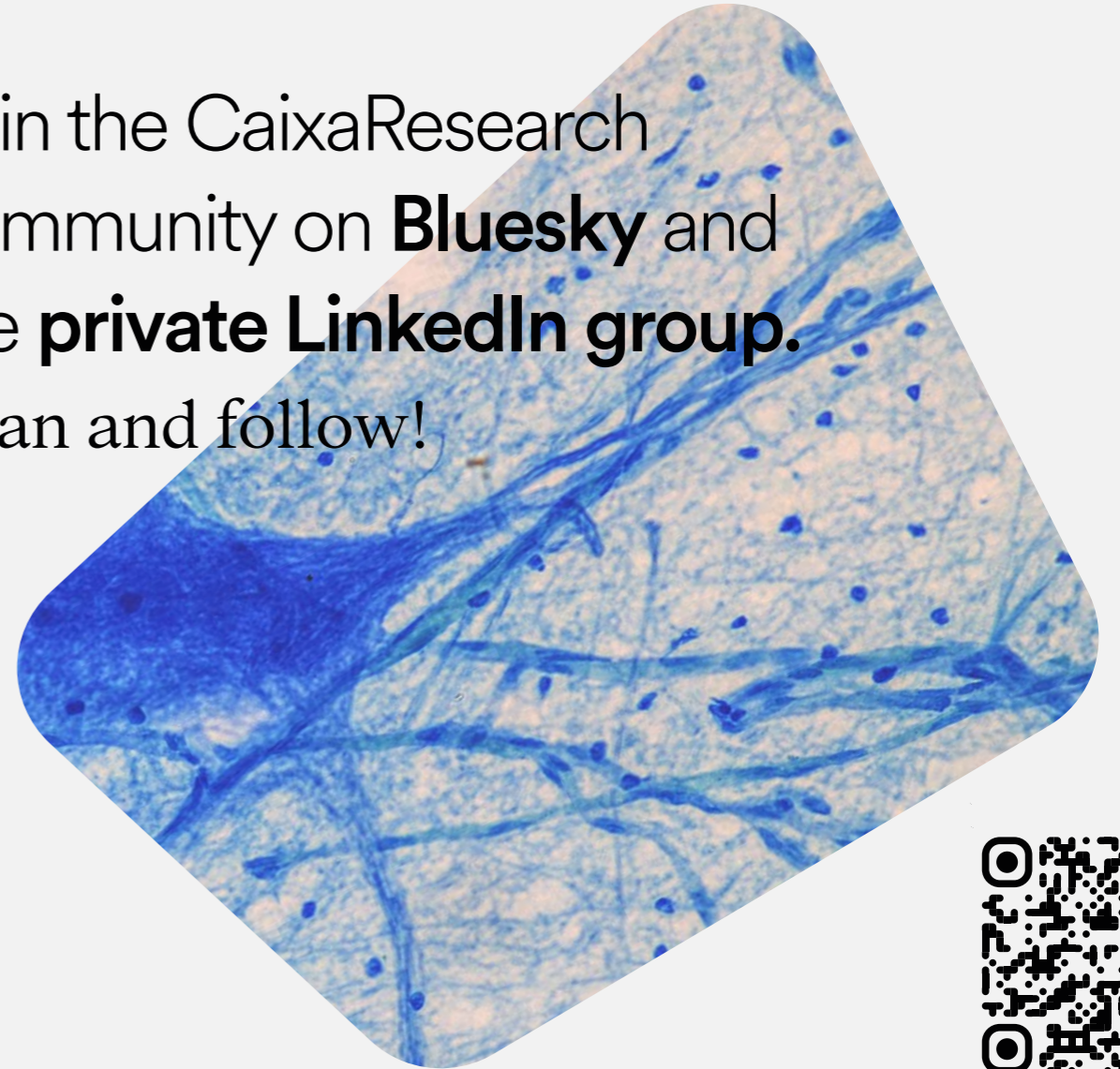
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Who is who
**Questions for
the future**

**Health
Research
Meeting**
2025

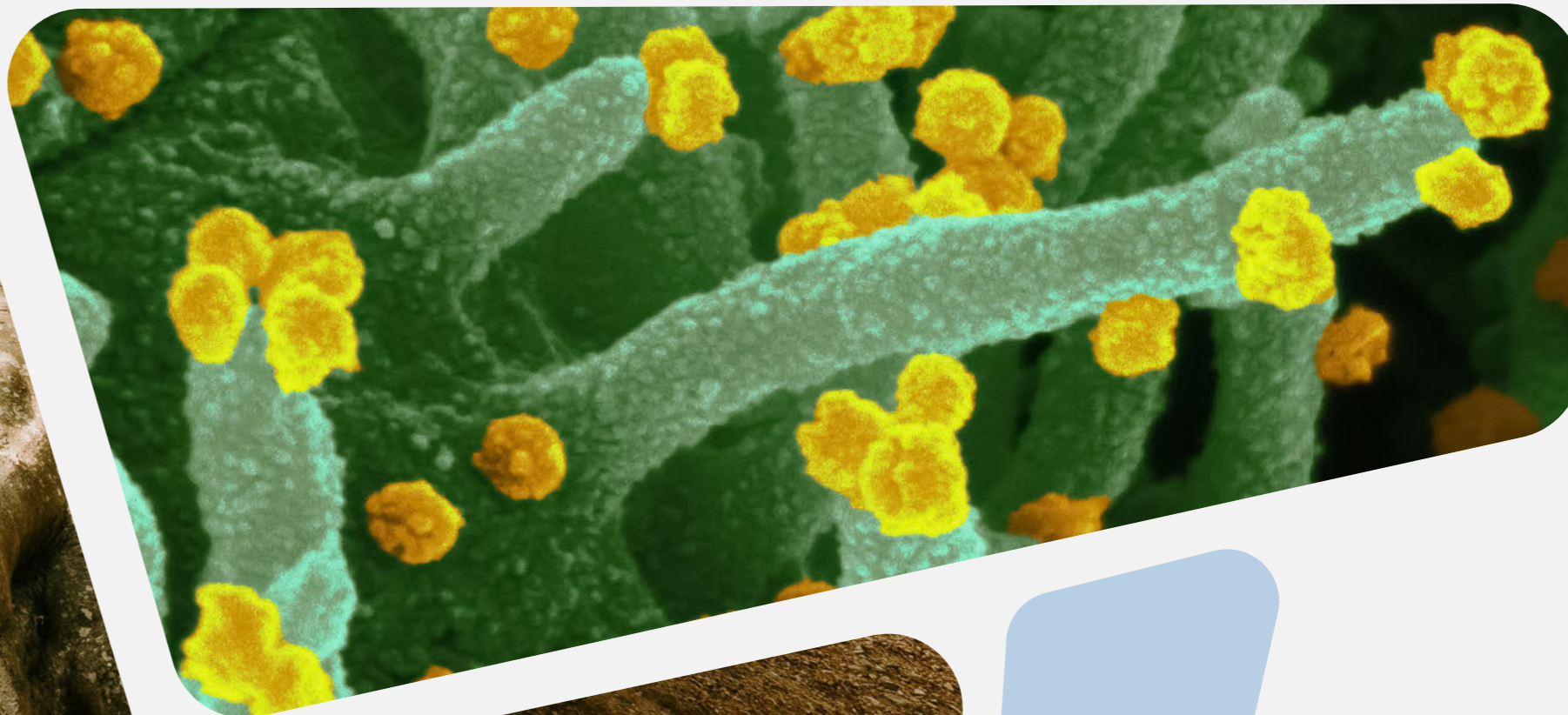
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Index

Cardiovascular and associated metabolic diseases	_____	07
Enabling technologies	_____	17
Infectious diseases	_____	31
Neuroscience	_____	43
Oncology	_____	55
Moderators	_____	65
Directory	_____	69



Cardiovascular
and associated
metabolic
diseases

How can we restore healthy cellular communication to combat obesity?

Endothelial cells cover the inner surface of blood vessels and supply oxygen and nutrients to the rest of the body. Inadequate oxygen supply to a tissue triggers angiogenesis, the formation of new blood vessels.

This process relies on sensing nutrient levels and signalling between endothelial and tissue cells. In obesity, fatty tissue expands without matching vascular growth, leading to dysfunction and disease.

This project studies how endothelial-tissue communication is altered in weight gain, aiming to restore healthy signalling to combat obesity and related conditions such as diabetes.



PROJECT LEADER

Alejo Efeyan

Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncológicas

Nutrient signaling & metabolic regulation

Alejo Efeyan studied biology in Buenos Aires and earned his PhD at CNIO, focusing on cancer protection by p53. He then moved to Boston for a postdoctoral experience with David M Sabatini at MIT, and started his studies on cellular metabolism. Alejo set up his lab at CNIO in 2016 to understand how nutrients shape physiological and pathological metabolism in the context of cancer, inflammation and ageing, and how to tune metabolism to restore health.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Mariona Graupera

Institut de Recerca Contra la Leucèmia Josep Carreras

Vascular biology & endothelial function

Mariona Graupera is a vascular biologist specializing in signalling. Trained at several institutions including the University of Barcelona, the Hospital Clinic de Barcelona, the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research, and the Bart's Cancer Institute in London, in 2009 establishing her lab at IDIBELL and, in 2021, joining the Josep Carreras Leukaemia Research Institute to study the ties between hematopoietic and endothelial cell lineages. In 2023 she became an ICREA Research Professor.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Josep Vidal

Institut d'Investigacions Biomèdiques August Pi i Sunyer

Clinical research in obesity & metabolic diseases

Josep Vidal is a medical doctor and researcher at Hospital Clínic and IDIBAPS in Barcelona, specialized in Endocrinology and Nutrition. He leads a research group at CIBERDEM and is a professor at the University of Barcelona. His work focuses on understanding the mechanisms underlying the many health benefits of metabolic-bariatric surgery in people living with obesity. For several years, he has studied the role of gastrointestinal hormones and more recently has shifted his focus to study the adipose tissue.



Can light-controlled drugs protect the heart during surgery after a heart attack?

A myocardial infarction happens when a blocked artery cuts off oxygen to heart cells causing them to die. Reperfusion, restoring blood flow, is the best treatment, but it can also damage the heart and no effective therapy currently prevents this.

The project will investigate a photochemical therapy to locally administer a new light-regulated cardio-protective drug that can be activated by illuminating specific areas of the heart during the first minutes of angioplasty, the primary treatment that dilates the obstructed blood vessel.

This system should avoid prolonged treatments and thereby minimise side effects.

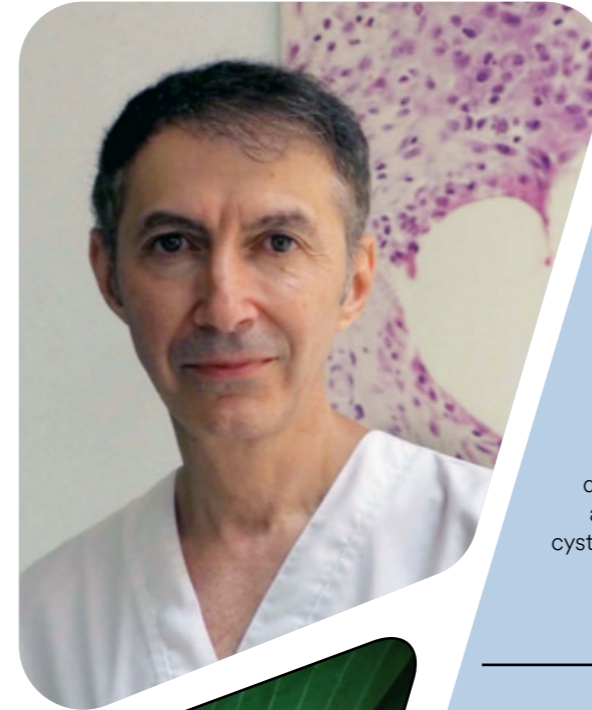
PROJECT LEADER

Amadeu Llebaria

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Design and synthesis of light-activated drugs

Amadeu Llebaria is a chemist working in the design and synthesis of organic molecules, medicinal chemistry and chemical biology both in basic science and industrial applications. He is now interested in the development of radically new approaches for drug therapeutics. Working in the borderland between chemistry, biology and biophysics, he is involved in chemical methods for endogenous protein labelling and controlling the activity of proteins and receptors using light-operated drugs.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Javier Inserte

Vall d'Hebron Institut de Recerca

Cardiac cell injury & protection mechanisms

Javier Inserte is Principal Investigator at the Vall d'Hebron Institut of Research. His early work contributed to shaping the current paradigm of myocardial ischemia/reperfusion injury and to the identification of cardioprotective targets. His current research focuses on cardiac remodelling and its progression to heart failure, with particular emphasis on the role of cysteine proteases and metabolic alterations in the development of hypertrophy and diffuse fibrosis.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Pedro Irazoqui

Johns Hopkins Biomedical Engineering

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Josep M^a Vidal

Associació Gironina de Prevenció i Ajuda a les Malalties del Cor - GICOR

CARDIOVASCULAR AND ASSOCIATED METABOLIC DISEASES

How can we better detect and treat severe fatty liver disease?

Obesity and diabetes are two public health pandemics that have contributed to the increase in chronic liver diseases, among which non-alcoholic fatty liver is the most prevalent.

This condition is difficult to diagnose and has no treatment. In addition, the accumulation of fat in the liver cells can lead to cirrhosis or liver cancer over the years.

The project investigates certain metabolism markers that will enable the development of new diagnostic tools and therapeutic targets for one of the most serious forms of fatty liver, non-alcoholic steatohepatitis.



PROJECT LEADER

Antonio Zorzano

Institute for Research in Biomedicine

Cellular metabolism & mitochondrial biology

Antonio Zorzano is Full Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Barcelona, Director of the Complex Metabolic Diseases and Mitochondria Laboratory at IRB Barcelona, and Group Leader of CIBERDEM. His current research focuses on the regulation of metabolism and its interaction with insulin resistance, obesity, type 2 diabetes and liver disease, linking metabolism with mitochondrial dynamics, mitochondrial function, autophagy and mitochondrial stress.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

M^a Isabel Hernández

Universidad de Barcelona

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Jorge Joven

Institut d'Investigació Sanitària Pere Virgili

What is the role of the **RIPK3** protein in the metabolic alterations of metabolic liver disease?

Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease is the most common chronic liver disease, affecting one third of the population. Moreover, the increase in diabetes and obesity around the world is increasing the risk of people developing the disease.

However, there is no reliable diagnosis or treatment for this disorder. One of the unexplored therapeutic targets is the RIPK protein, which affects cell death and whose role in liver inflammation is unknown.

The project focuses on RIPK to understand the metabolic disturbances that contribute to inflammation and the death of liver cells, with the aim of preventing the disease and finding drugs that can influence its course.

PROJECT LEADER

Cecília Rodrigues

Research Institute for Medicines, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Lisbon

Translational pharmacology for metabolic liver disease

Cecília Rodrigues is Full Professor of Biochemistry at the Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Lisbon, and group leader at the Research Institute for Medicines (iMed. ULisboa). She obtained her PhD in Biochemistry from the University of Lisbon, followed by postdoctoral training in liver pathophysiology and metabolism in the United States. Her research explores the molecular basis of metabolic and degenerative diseases, with the goal of identifying novel diagnostic and therapeutic targets.



Can we improve **Type 2 Diabetes** risk prediction by understanding **transcriptional cis-regulation**?

Type 2 diabetes is a public health problem that results in other major complications such as cardiovascular disease, which can lead to premature death.

Pancreas dysfunction is due both to lifestyle and genetic susceptibilities that prevent the proper production of insulin. Most of these genetic variants are found in the non-coding DNA regions.

The project analyses these sequences of genetic material to determine their impact on genetic functions and thereby identify both new markers that predispose to the onset of diabetes and new therapies.

PROJECT LEADER

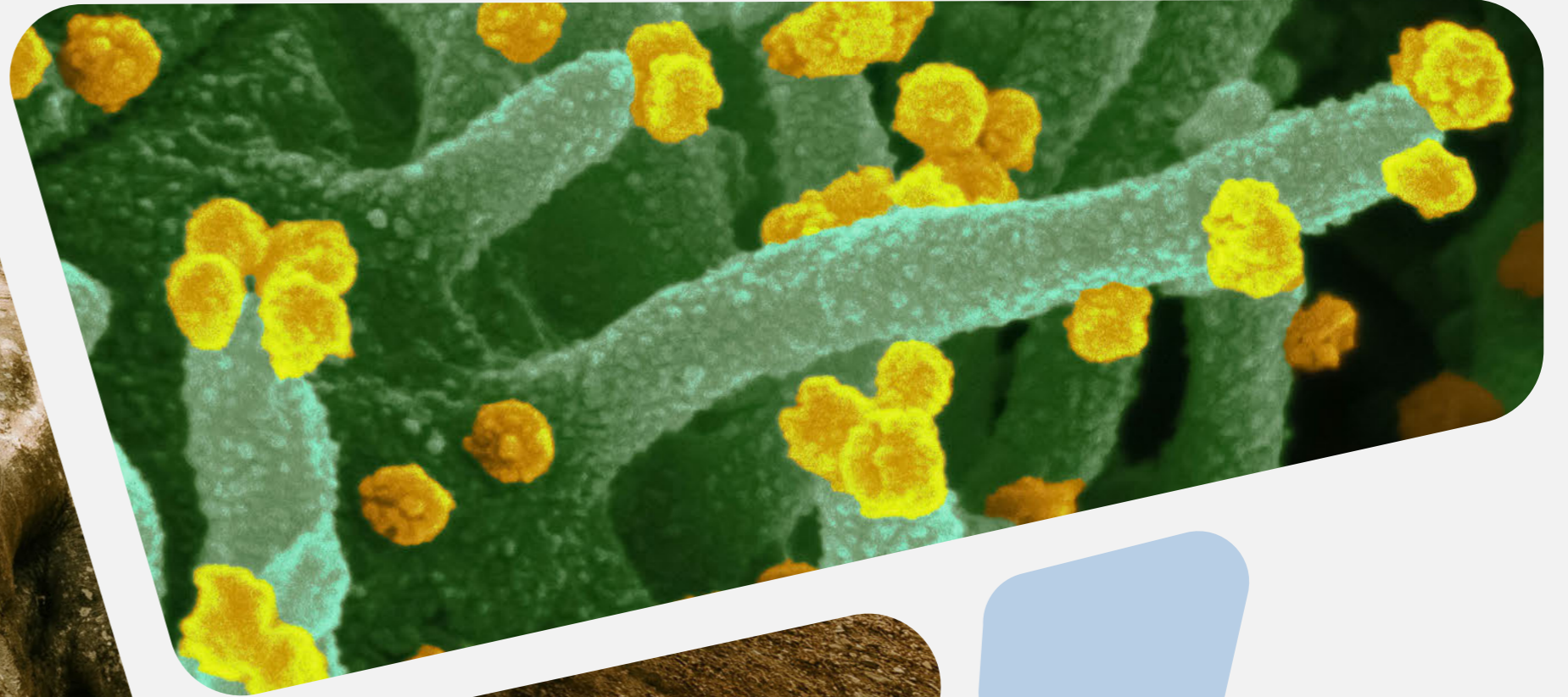
Jose Bessa

Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde - i3S

Transcriptional cis-regulation in pancreas function and disease

José Bessa is the group leader of the Vertebrate Development and Regeneration group at i3S in Porto. His current research focuses on the genetic networks that govern pancreas specification, development, and function with particular emphasis on how non-coding cis-regulatory mutations contribute to diseases such as diabetes and pancreatic cancer. Using zebrafish as a vertebrate model, he generates targeted regulatory mutations to link non-coding genomic variation to phenotype.





**Enabling
technologies**

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Can nanodevices help us understand how brain cells communicate?

Neurological disorders affect more than a quarter of the world's population. They all share alterations in the communication of neurons, in which the chemical and electrical signals of the brain do not work correctly.

Lack of knowledge about the brain hinders progress in the diagnosis and treatment of neurological diseases. One of the reasons is the lack of tools to investigate the brain and its neural connections.

The project uses graphene nanotechnology, molecular biology and neuroengineering to develop and validate a new device that can monitor neurons' chemical and electrical messages to understand the brain further.

PROJECT LEADER

Pedro Alpuim

International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory

Graphene-based biosensors and 2D materials

Pedro Alpuim is an Associate Professor at the Physics Department of the University of Minho and Group Leader at the International Iberian Nanotechnology Laboratory (INL). The Alpuim research group is a leader in the integrated design and fabrication of graphene-based biosensors, including the control electronics to power the chips and acquire signals using various concepts and acquisition rates. To achieve chemical selectivity, the group has developed several functionalization routes, based on covalent and non-covalent immobilization strategies.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Carlos Briones

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Patricia Monteiro

Universidade do Minho

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

How can we understand and predict which mutations influence pathological protein aggregation across neurodegenerative diseases?

Neurodegenerative diseases are associated with the pathological accumulation of certain proteins in the brain. Beta-amyloid forms plaques in Alzheimer's disease, the alpha-synuclein, and in Parkinson's disease, and tau is associated with frontotemporal dementia.

In addition, certain mutations cause some people to develop less frequent and more aggressive forms of these dementias which accelerate the accumulation of these proteins in the brain and the subsequent neurodegeneration.

The project contributes to better understanding the variants that cause these dementias and to developing a reference atlas of thousands of mutations to predict whether a person is more susceptible to dementia.



PROJECT LEADER

Ben Lehner

Centre for Genomic Regulation

Genomics

Ben Lehner is Head of Generative and Synthetic Genomics at the Wellcome Sanger Institute in Cambridge, an ICREA Professor at the CRG in Barcelona and an Honorary Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Cambridge. His research is currently focussed on using massively parallel synthesis/selection/sequencing experiments and machine learning to quantify, understand and predict sequence-to-activity (particularly the properties of macromolecules) at scale.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Benedetta Bolognesi

Institut de Bioenginyeria de Catalunya

Protein aggregation and intrinsically disordered proteins

Benedetta Bolognesi is the Group Leader of the Phase Transitions in Health and Disease lab at IBEC. Her research focuses on how protein self-assembly causes cellular toxicity. Her group has pioneered novel experimental and computational approaches to map the effects of millions of mutations in disordered proteins, generating foundational insights into amyloid nucleation and protein aggregation, and has published the first large-scale mutational maps of protein-induced toxicity.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Can we create effective drugs to treat breast cancer once it reaches the brain?

Cancers that metastasize prefer specific organs to spread. For example, the primary tumour in the most aggressive breast cancer tends to replicate in the brain, which increases its mortality.

Once in the brain, the tumour is difficult to treat because the organ is protected by the blood-brain barrier that prevents the entrance of drugs. This requires new approaches to overcome this obstacle and eliminate metastasis.

The project investigates the design of a drug, inspired by antibodies, that is capable of reaching the breast and brain to avoid resistance to chemotherapy and the presence of stem cells that cause cell division and metastasis.

PROJECT LEADER

Miguel Castanho

Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine

Peptide therapeutics & membrane biology

Miguel Castanho is Head of the Department of Biochemistry at the School of Medicine of the University of Lisbon and PI at GIMM, Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine. The goal of his group is to unravel the physical principles that govern interactions at the molecular level of clinically relevant compounds with animal models and model cell systems, with the aim of developing new drugs, as well as improving the understanding of the mechanism(s) of action of established drugs.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Jordi Llop

Center for Cooperative Research in Biomaterials

Radiochemistry & molecular imaging

Jordi Llop is Principal Investigator at CIC biomaGUNE and leads the Radiochemistry and Nuclear Imaging Laboratory. His current work focuses on the development of radiolabelled compounds (small molecules, biomolecules, nanoparticles) for in vivo imaging using positron emission tomography (PET), with applications in drug development, diagnostics and the understanding of disease biology—particularly in neurodegeneration, oncology and nanomedicine.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Charles Lawrie

Asociación Instituto Biodonostia

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

João Gonçalves

Associação da Faculdade de Farmácia para a Investigação e Desenvolvimento - FARM-ID



ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

How can we use immunotherapy to fight solid tumours?

The immune system is composed of different types of cells that protect us from many diseases. However, in the case of cancer the tumour suppresses the activity of these defences, making them incapable of identifying and eliminating it.

Immunotherapy is an oncological treatment that stimulates a specific type of defence to attack the tumour, in this case T-cells. This therapy, which combines cell therapy with genetic engineering, is efficacious against some tumours, such as haematological malignancies, but in the case of solid tumours is less effective.

The project investigates how this type of therapy, based on the infusion of T-cells capable of recognising tumours, can also help to attack solid tumours, which are responsible for three out of every four deaths from cancer.



PROJECT LEADER - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Sonia Guedan

Instituto de Investigaciones Biomédicas
August Pi i Sunyer



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Asís Palazón

Center for Cooperative Research in Biosciences

*Antibody engineering, immunotherapy,
tumour microenvironment*

Asís Palazón is a molecular immunologist with a background in translational cancer research, currently leading a research group at CIC bioGUNE in Bilbao. His expertise focuses on the development of targeted immunotherapies, including monoclonal and bispecific antibodies, with a particular emphasis on strategies to modulate the tumour microenvironment. He leads Adaptam Therapeutics, a biotech spin-off focused on developing next-generation immunotherapies.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Alena Gros

Vall d'Hebron Institute of Oncology

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Can self-propelled nanobots enhance drug delivery to bladder tumours?

Bladder cancer is one of the ten most common cancers and the fifth most frequent in Spain. Despite current therapies being quite effective, the tumour reappears in 70% of cases and treatments lose their efficacy.

Faced with this challenge, nanobots can be an excellent vehicle to deliver drugs to the tumour and thereby minimise side effects. However, only 0.7% of nanoparticles used in oncology manage to reach their target.

The project seeks to design self-propelled nanobots that reach the tumour cells and deliver the most appropriate drug against bladder cancer. In the future, this technology could be used to treat other types of cancer.



PROJECT LEADER

Samuel Sánchez

Institut de Bioenginyeria de Catalunya

Nanorobotics & bioengineering for medical applications

Samuel Sánchez is an ICREA Research Professor, Group Leader, Deputy Director at the Institute for Bioengineering of Catalonia (IBEC), and co-founder and CSO of Nanobots Therapeutics SL, with an international research career spanning premier institutions in Japan and Germany. He specializes in the design and development of advanced nano- to mesoscale biohybrid robotics and self-propelled nanoparticles as intelligent vehicles for biomedical applications.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Jordi Llop

Center for Cooperative Research in Biomaterials

Radiochemistry & molecular imaging

Jordi Llop is Principal Investigator at CIC biomaGUNE and leads the Radiochemistry and Nuclear Imaging Laboratory. His current work focuses on the development of radiolabelled compounds (small molecules, biomolecules, nanoparticles) for in vivo imaging using positron emission tomography (PET), with applications in drug development, diagnostics and the understanding of disease biology—particularly in neurodegeneration, oncology and nanomedicine.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Esther Julián

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Immunostimulation & antitumour activity of mycobacteria

Esther Julián is a Full Professor of Microbiology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), where she leads pioneering research into mycobacteriology. She earned her PhD in Biology specializing in the immunodiagnosis of tuberculosis and completed her training in Immunology at Stockholm University. She then established the Mycobacteria Research Laboratory, focusing on the use of non-pathogenic mycobacteria as innovative immunotherapeutic agents for cancer and infectious diseases.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Antoni Vilaseca

Fundació Clínic per la Recerca Biomèdica

Health Research Meeting

2025

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Can self-propelled nanobots enhance drug delivery to bladder tumours?

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION

Jordi Díaz

Associació Catalana de Comunicació Científica

Nanoscience communication

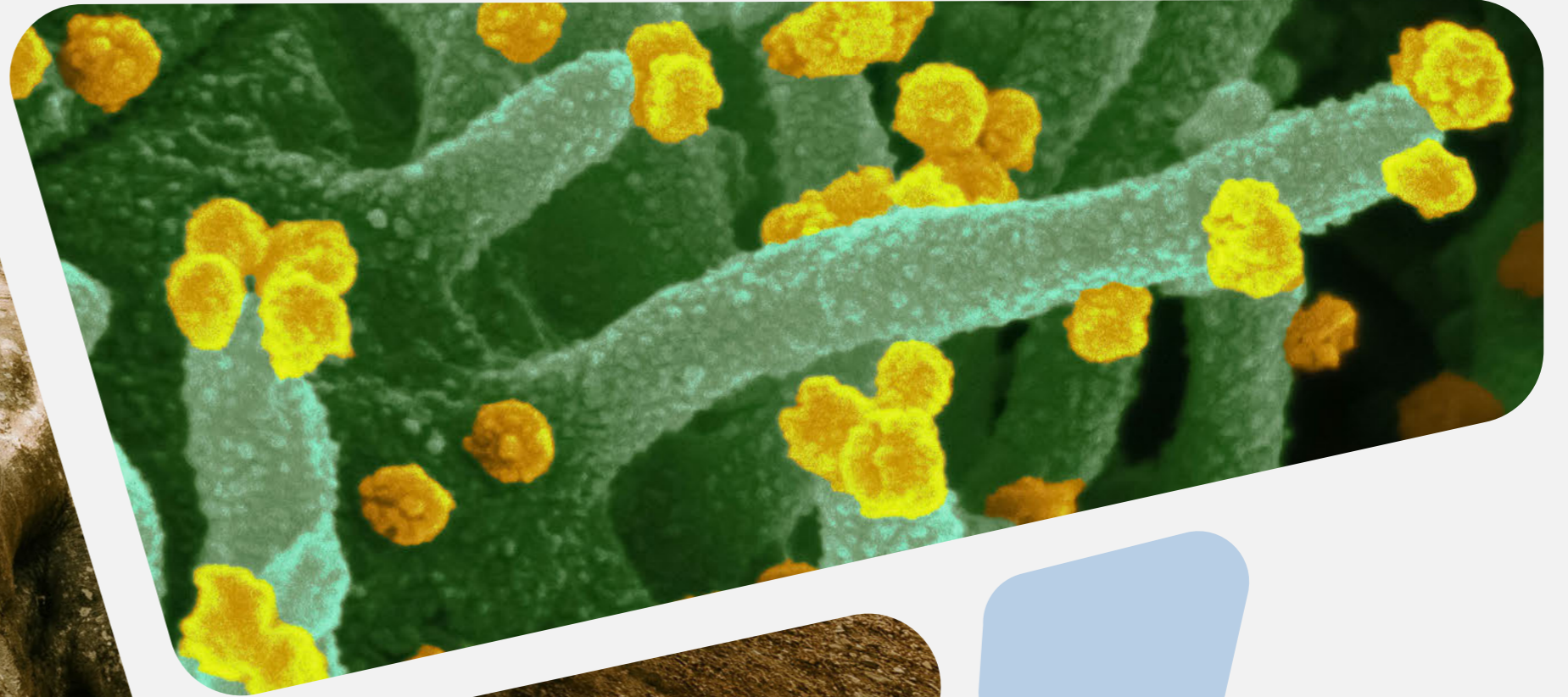
Jordi Díaz Marcos is a chemist, materials engineer and science communicator. He earned a degree and PhD in Chemistry from the University of Barcelona, a Master's in Molecular Biotechnology and Materials Engineering from the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, and a postgraduate certificate in Science Communication. Since 2007 he has headed the Nanometric Techniques Unit at CCiTUB (University of Barcelona), specializing in atomic force microscopy and advanced optical microscopy.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Lluís Farrés

Fundació Catalunya La Pedrera





**Infectious
diseases**

How does the malaria parasite hide in human erythropoietic organs?

Infectious diseases kill 17 million people every year in the poorest regions on the planet. One such disease is the malaria caused by the world's most widely distributed malaria parasite, *Plasmodium vivax*.

One of the many unanswered questions is why some people develop serious forms of this malaria despite presenting low levels of the parasite in their blood. One hypothesis is that the pathogen hides in the bone marrow and spleen, enabling the parasites to produce nanovesicles called exosomes.

The project develops a miniature model of human bone marrow and spleen (organ-on-a-chip technology) to investigate the parasite's hiding places in the organism, uncover the role of exosomes and eliminate malaria.

PROJECT LEADER

Hernando A. del Portillo

Instituto de Salud Global de Barcelona

Molecular & exosome-based malaria research

Hernando A. del Portillo earned his PhD in Molecular Parasitology from the University of Georgia (USA), followed by a PhD at NYU Medical Center (New York, USA) and the Institut Pasteur (Paris). He is a Senior Research Professor at ISGlobal and an ICREA Research Professor. His research focuses on the neglected malaria parasite *Plasmodium vivax*, and has pioneered studies on reticulocyte-derived exosomes, key to understanding *P. vivax* pathogenesis.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Cristina Barrias

Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde - i3S

Biomaterials & Tissue Engineering

Cristina Barrias is Principal Investigator at i3S and Associate Professor at ICBAS, University of Porto. She is also Vice-President of the Instituto de Engenharia Biomédica (University of Porto), Vice-President of the European Society for Biomaterials, and Managing Editor of Materials Today Bio. She leads the Bioengineered 3D Microenvironments group at i3S, focusing on the creation of next-generation biomimetic platforms that replicate the architecture and function of human tissues.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Aurora Hernandez-Machado

Universitat de Barcelona

Microfluidics & Biophysics

Aurora Hernandez-Machado is a Full Professor of Condensed Matter Physics at the University of Barcelona. Her research focuses on the fields of Biophysics, Microfluidics and Nanoscience, especially on the Biomechanics of biosystems such as biofluids, red blood cells, bacteria, cancer and malaria. She has introduced the concept of "Front Microrheology," which has led to international patents and the creation of a spin-off company, RheoDiagnostics S.L.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Wanlapa Roobsoong

Mahidol University

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Can we use synthetic viruses to safely treat bacterial infections?

The emergence of new pathogens, partly due to resistance to antibiotics, is a public health problem. Current drugs are generic and attack a wide variety of bacteria, including those in our intestines. Consequently, many of the treatments against bacterial infections also compromise our health.

In nature, bacteria have their own enemies, bacteriophages. These are viruses that specifically infect bacteria and can be used in therapies to control infectious diseases.

The project investigates the characteristics of bacteriophages in order to develop innovative therapies based on synthetic viruses that attack the infection without impacting human health.



PROJECT LEADER - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Joana Azeredo

Universidade do Minho



TEAM MEMBER

Hugo Oliveira

Centre of Biological Engineering

*Bacteriophage therapy, Molecular biology,
Proteomics and Bioinformatics*

Hugo Oliveira holds a PhD in Chemical and Biological Engineering and is Tenured Assistant Researcher at the Centre of Biological Engineering (CEB), University of Minho. He focuses on antimicrobial resistance through bacteriophage-inspired strategies, including the isolation of novel antibacterial proteins and the characterization of therapeutic bacteriophages, with the aim of developing next-generation antibacterial tools targeting priority pathogens.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Can we boost the immune system to fight tuberculosis more effectively?

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by a bacteria that results in 10 million new cases and 1.4 million deaths each year. There are patients who show severe forms of disease whilst others present mild or moderate forms.

The mechanisms underpinning these differences remain unknown but it is thought that the interaction between the immune system and tuberculosis bacteria during the infection process play a role in determining the severity of the disease.

The project investigates new immune therapies against the bacterium *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, based on the dialogue between the pathogen and the patient's defences, especially those at work in the lungs.



PROJECT LEADER

Margarida Saraiva

Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde - i3S

Host-pathogen interactions in tuberculosis

Margarida Saraiva is Group Leader at i3S-Porto, studying how *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* modulates the immune response to control tuberculosis severity. Her team combines human cohorts, experimental models and in vitro systems to identify the diversity of host-pathogen interactions taking place in tuberculosis and how they control the way the disease unfolds. They have become one of the few groups in the world linking clinical data, *M. tuberculosis* genetic diversity and immune responses.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Iñaki Comas

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Tuberculosis evolution & genomics

Iñaki Comas is Full Professor at CSIC and head of the Tuberculosis Genomics Unit at IBV-CSIC, as well as holding a PhD in Biological Sciences from the University of Valencia and carrying out postdoctoral research at the National Institute for Medical Research in London. His team works on leveraging genomics to understanding infection mechanisms in tuberculosis and other pathogens from an evolutionary perspective. Their long-term goal is to understand how bacterial and human diversity shape different aspects of tuberculosis disease.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Anne O'Garra

Francis Crick Institute

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Can genetically modified parasites be used to create an effective vaccine for malaria?

Malaria is the most prevalent parasitic disease in the world, especially in the poorest regions of the planet. A vaccine is key to the prevention and elimination of this epidemic, in accordance with the United Nations' goals.

One of the most successful approaches to malaria vaccination is based on attenuated sporozoites, the parasite forms that are injected by mosquitoes and infect human hosts. However, the existing approaches using sporozoite-based vaccination face important challenges, including their limited scope of action.

The project will develop and pre-clinically characterize novel vaccine candidates against the two deadliest human malaria parasites, *Plasmodium falciparum* and *Plasmodium vivax*, based on a new technology that employs genetically modified rodent malaria parasites as immunization agents, to provide new prevention strategies.



PROJECT LEADER

Miguel Prudêncio

Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine

Plasmodium liver-stage biology & vaccine development

Miguel Prudêncio is Group Leader at the Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine and Principal Investigator at the University of Lisbon. His research focuses on *Plasmodium*, the causative agent of malaria, with the aim of harnessing the liver stage of its life cycle to identify novel strategies to combat this disease. His primary goal is to contribute to the development of vaccines to prevent infection by both *P. falciparum* and *P. vivax*, the two deadliest human malaria parasites.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Brandon Wilder

US Naval Medical Research Unit 6

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Blandine Franke-Fayard

Leiden University

Health Research Meeting

2025

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Can targeting our own immune response help treat tuberculosis?

Macrophages are white blood cells that defend the body against pathogenic bacteria. In tuberculosis, the bacteria survive and multiply inside these cells, worsening the infection and leading to new cases.

The pathogen has adapted to hijack the immune system's defences, such as the tumour necrosis factor (TNF), a protein that triggers inflammation and can harm tissues if its production is uncontrolled.

This project aims to develop therapies that intercept the negative effects of TNF. These can be used in drug-sensitive and drug-resistant cases, reduce disease severity and transmission, and potentially help treat other inflammatory illnesses.

PROJECT LEADER

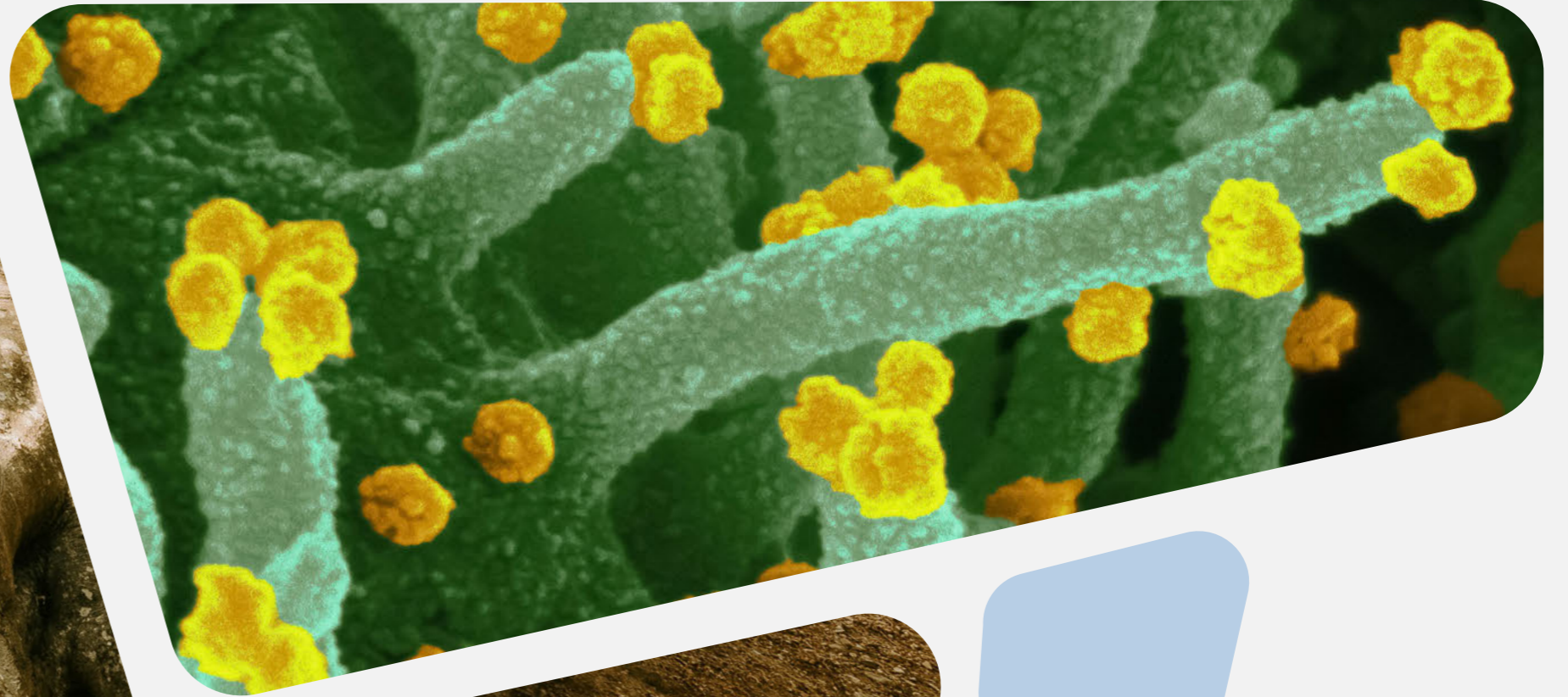
Francisco José Roca

Universidad de Murcia

Immune response & host-pathogen interaction in tuberculosis

Francisco José Roca obtained his PhD in Biology in Spain and then joined the Department of Microbiology (University of Washington, USA) as a PhD Fellow and later the Department of Medicine (University of Cambridge, UK) as a Senior Research Associate. For most of his scientific career he has been exploiting the zebrafish as an animal model to study host-pathogen interactions in tuberculosis leading to the identification of host-susceptibility and host-resistance factors.





Neuroscience

Can we treat ALS with kinase inhibitors that restore the physiological balance of TDP-43 in cells?

The pathological accumulation of the TDP-43 protein is associated with the appearance of neurodegenerative disorders such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a fatal disease urgently in need of effective treatments.

The development of drugs that enable recovery of the TDP-43 protein function in the motor neurons of people with ALS is a novel therapeutic approach.

The project focuses on investigating certain kinase inhibitors that may ultimately lead to promising personalised therapies to treat ALS and other pathologies by regulating the physiological balance of TDP-43.

PROJECT LEADER

Ana Martínez

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Drug design for neurodegenerative & infectious diseases

Ana Martínez is a Research Professor at CIB-CSIC, has a background in medicinal chemistry, a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and extensive experience in technology transfer. With over 30 years of experience in translational drug design and development, mainly focused on neurodegenerative and infectious diseases, her work bridges fundamental research and clinical application. Her research is primarily devoted to discovering drugs for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Dora Brites

Associação da Faculdade de Farmácia para a Investigação e Desenvolvimento (FARM-ID, iMed. ULisboa)

Neuroinflammation & glial cell dysfunction

Dora Brites is the former leader of Neuroinflammation, Signalling and Neuroregeneration at the Research Institute for Medicines (iMed.ULisboa) and Emeritus Researcher at Universidade de Lisboa. The group has expertise in microglia/astrocyte immunophenotypic aberrancies and paracrine distress by miRNA-vesicle trafficking, particularly focusing on the discovery of early pathological drivers/biomarkers, the generation of patient-stratification tools for disease modelling and autologous regenerative strategies.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Eva de Lago

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Neurodegeneration & cannabinoids

Eva de Lago Femia is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Medicine, Complutense University of Madrid, and Director of the Neurochemistry University Institute of UCM. Her current research focuses on the role of the endocannabinoid system in neurodegenerative diseases, particularly amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and frontotemporal dementia (FTD), using both preclinical models and human samples to ultimately inform the development of new therapeutic strategies.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Valle Palomo

IMDEA Nanociencias

How do mutations in astrocyte intermediate filament proteins lead to neurodegeneration in Alexander disease?

Alexander disease is a rare genetic condition that progressively destroys the white matter of the brain and neurons, leading to serious neurological alterations and eventually causing death.

This condition is caused by mutations in the glial fibrillary acidic protein (GFAP) found in the astrocytes, a type of glial cell, which are essential for the nervous system to function properly.

The project investigates how GFAP mutations in astrocytes come to cause significant damage both in these cells and in neurons. This knowledge will also help to understand the mechanisms of other more frequent neurodegenerative diseases.

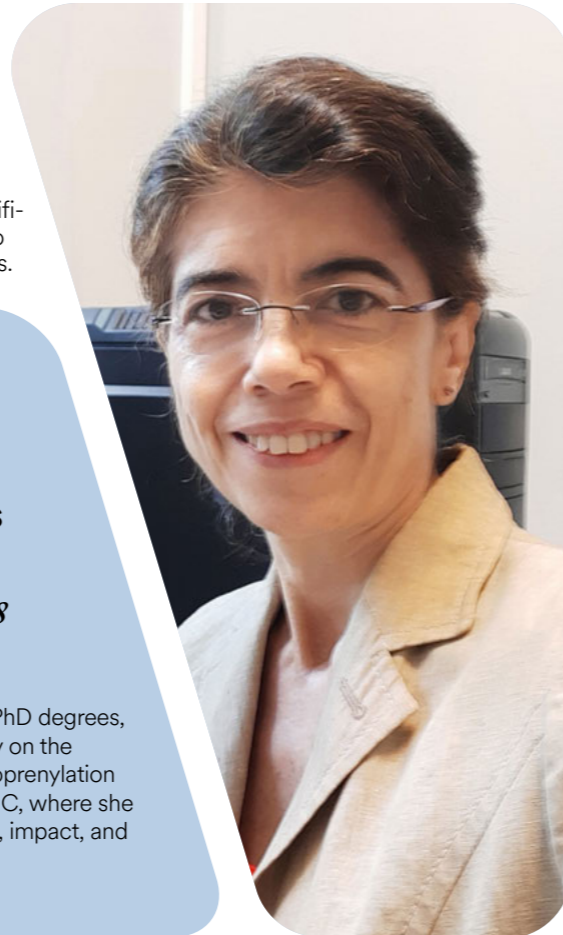
PROJECT LEADER

Dolores Pérez-Sala

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Redox regulation and intermediate filaments in health and disease

Dolores Pérez-Sala is a researcher at the CSIC. After obtaining her MD and PhD degrees, she joined Harvard Medical School for her postdoctoral work, focusing mainly on the posttranslational modifications of retinal proteins, specifically, on G protein isoprenylation and methylation, as well as the development of inhibitors. She then joined CSIC, where she has focused on identifying novel post-translational modifications, their targets, impact, and regulation.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Mariona Jové

Institut de Recerca Biomèdica de Lleida

Lipidomics, oxidative stress and brain aging

Mariona Jové is an Associate Professor of Physiology at the University of Lleida and a senior researcher at IRBLleida. Her current expertise lies in the application of lipidomics and redox biology to investigate aging and age-related neurodegenerative diseases. Her current research focuses on integrating omics data with electronic health records to identify novel biomarkers for the early detection, monitoring and prevention of aging-associated conditions.



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Michael Daries

University of Copenhagen

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Elly Hol

University Medical Center Utrecht Brain Center



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Milos Pekny

University of Gothenburg

Can we restore mobility and vision by guiding the regrowth of neuronal axons after damage?

Lesions of the central nervous system that can affect mobility or vision are one of the leading causes of disability among young adults and the elderly due to accidents and the ageing process.

Regenerative medicine promises new therapies to treat these lesions by means of the growth and guidance of neuron extensions, or axons, thereby restoring damaged neuronal connectivity.

The project investigates how to guide the damaged visual or spinal neurons following a lesion, with the intention of reconnecting them with their proper targets in the brain

PROJECT LEADER

Eloísa Herrera

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Generation and regeneration of neural circuits

Eloísa Herrera is a CSIC Research Professor and Group Leader at the Instituto de Neurociencias in Alicante. Her line of research focuses on the cellular and molecular mechanisms that guide the axons of visual and spinal neurons during development and how these mechanisms could be reactivated to promote axonal regrowth after injury in the adult central nervous system.



Can studying brain support cells lead to new treatments for depression?

Depression is a mental health problem that affects more than 300 million people worldwide, of whom 65% relapse following treatment. The disorder causes cognitive impairments that reduce quality of life.

The neurological basis of depression is still unknown but the condition correlates with alterations of the neuronal functions in the region of the limbic and cortical systems of the brain.

The project investigates the role of astrocytes in depression to find new therapeutic targets, since previous results suggest that molecular and structural alterations of these cells underlie the development of depression.

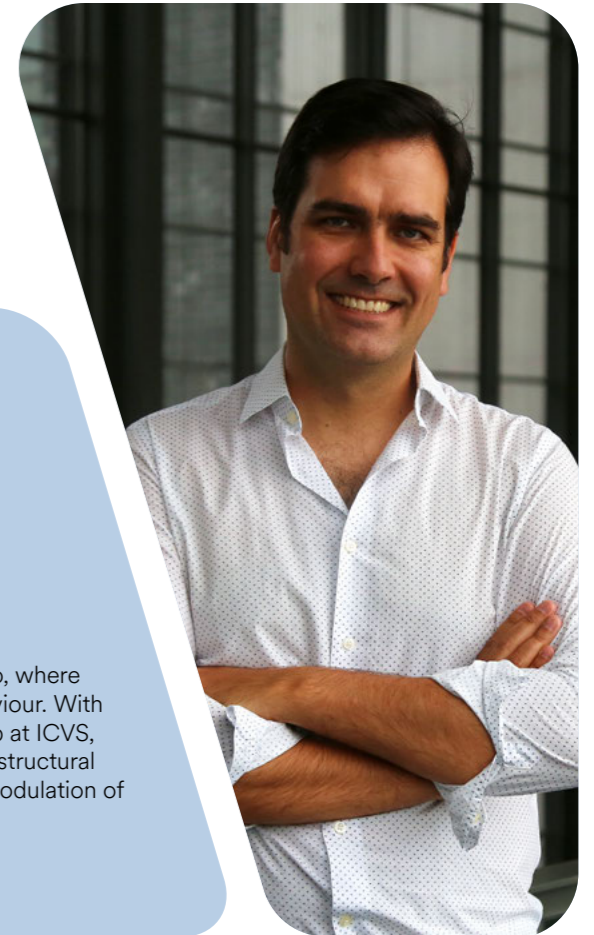
PROJECT LEADER

João Filipe Oliveira

Universidade do Minho

Astrocyte modulation of neural circuits

João Filipe Oliveira is Principal Investigator at ICVS – University of Minho, where he leads research into the astrocyte modulation of brain circuits and behaviour. With a PhD from Leipzig University and a Marie Curie Intra European Fellowship at ICVS, he employs complementary behavioural, electrophysiological techniques, structural analyses and multiomics to study mouse models to assess the astrocyte modulation of cortico-limbic circuits, impacting behaviour.



NEUROSCIENCE

Can we use AI to understand memory in health, with implications in neurological disorders?

The hippocampus is a brain structure involved in the construction of episodic memory, related to autobiographical events that can be explicitly stated or conjured and which influence decision-making and actions.

These functions are the result of the sequential activation of a variety of neurons coordinated by very fast brain waves. Some of the mechanisms involved show alterations in neurological disorders such as epilepsy, insomnia and Alzheimer's.

The project seeks to enhance our understanding of the hippocampal sequential code associated with the formation of memories. It employs artificial intelligence techniques and aims to design new strategies that enable the episodic memory to be restored and maintained in this type of pathology.

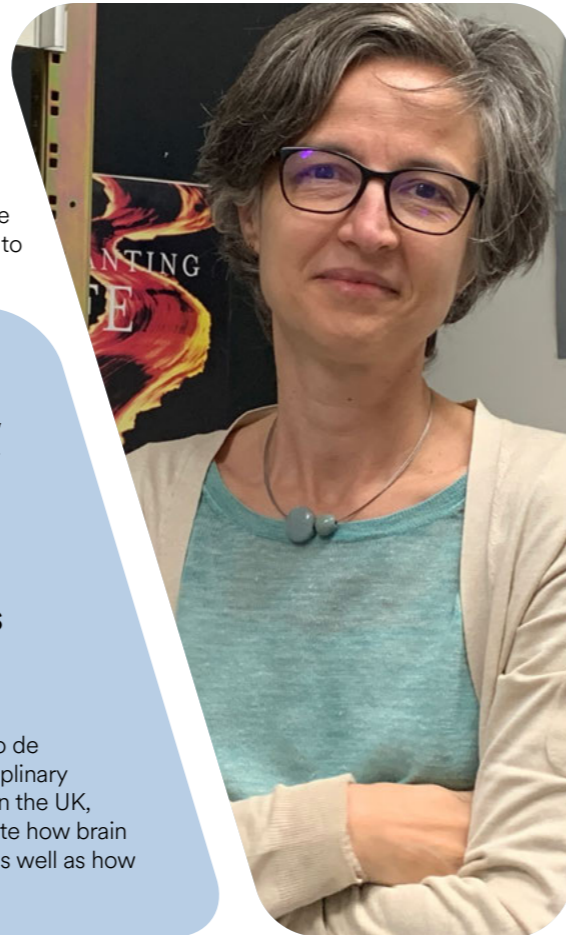
PROJECT LEADER

Liset Menéndez de la Prida

Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas

Neural circuit dynamics of the hippocampus

Liset M de la Prida is Full Research Professor and Director of the Laboratorio de Circuitos Neuronales at the Instituto Cajal (CSIC). She has a strong multidisciplinary background in systems neuroscience, shaped by training at top laboratories in the UK, France and the US. Her lab bridges systems neuroscience and AI to investigate how brain rhythms, circuit architecture and neural population codes support memory, as well as how these processes go awry in epilepsy and other brain disorders.



NEUROSCIENCE

What is the molecular link between chronic stress and synaptic dysfunction?

Chronic stress endangers mental health due to its effects on the brain, especially in some regions such as the prefrontal cortex, involved in planning complex behaviours and making decisions.

MicroRNAs are small RNA molecules that regulate the expression of specific genes. High levels of some of them, such as miR-186-5p, may be implicated in mental disorders that emerge in response to chronic stress.

The project studies how altered miR-186-5p levels in the prefrontal cortex contribute to changes in neuronal communication and cognitive performance as a maladaptive response to chronic stress, in order to identify new therapeutic targets, as well as understand the sex differences in the adverse brain effects of chronic stress.

PROJECT LEADER

Paulo Pinheiro

Center for Neuroscience and Cell Biology

Synapse biology & neurophysiology

Paulo Pinheiro is currently an Assistant Professor with a PhD in Cellular Biology from the University of Coimbra and over 20 years of neuroscience research. His interests include improving our understanding of the molecular changes caused by chronic stress at the level of specific brain circuits and individual synapse types, and the identification of strategies to mitigate the negative impact of stress in the brain, with the future goal of developing translational applications to human health.



Can reprogramming damaged brain cells help slow down Huntington's disease?

Huntington's disease is the most common hereditary neurodegenerative disorder, typically emerging between 30 and 40 years of age. It causes motor dysfunction, including progressive involuntary movements (chorea), due to neuronal deterioration.

Little is known about early neuronal alterations in the striatum during brain development and how they translate into the pathology as an adult.

This project analyses the role of neuronal precursor cells that differentiate into striatal neurons, aiming to determine their impact on the disease and to halt or delay its onset via the in vivo reprogramming of damaged neuronal circuits.



PROJECT LEADER

Josep M. Canals

Universitat de Barcelona

Stem cell therapies for Huntington's disease

Josep M. Canals is Full Professor at the Dept. of Biomedical Sciences of the University of Barcelona (UB) and director of Creatio UB. He has extensive experience in cell therapy for neurological disorders and neurodevelopment. His team has been working on the use of stem cells as cell therapy for neurodegenerative diseases and is now focusing on the study of neurodevelopment in Huntington's disease and on producing in vitro and in silico models for this disease.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Zaal Kokaia

Lund University

Neural stem cells & brain repair

Zaal Kokaia is a Professor of Experimental Medical Research at the Medical Faculty, Lund University (Sweden). He has a PhD both from Tbilisi, Georgia and from Sweden. He is one of the founding Principal Investigators of the Lund Stem Cell Center Stem Cell Center and has also served as its Director. He is currently developing an ex vivo platform that combines microfluidics and human reprogrammed cell- and primary cortical tissue-based systems to mimic neurological disorders.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Anne Rosser

Cardiff University

Neurodegenerative diseases & brain repair

Anne Rosser is Professor of Clinical Neuroscience at Cardiff University and Honorary Consultant Neurologist at the University Hospital of Wales. She undertook her PhD at Cambridge University and medical training at the National Hospital for Neurology in London and at Addenbrookes hospital in Cambridge. She focuses on regenerative medicine and the delivery of advanced therapy medicinal products for neurodegenerative conditions, in particular cell therapies for HD.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

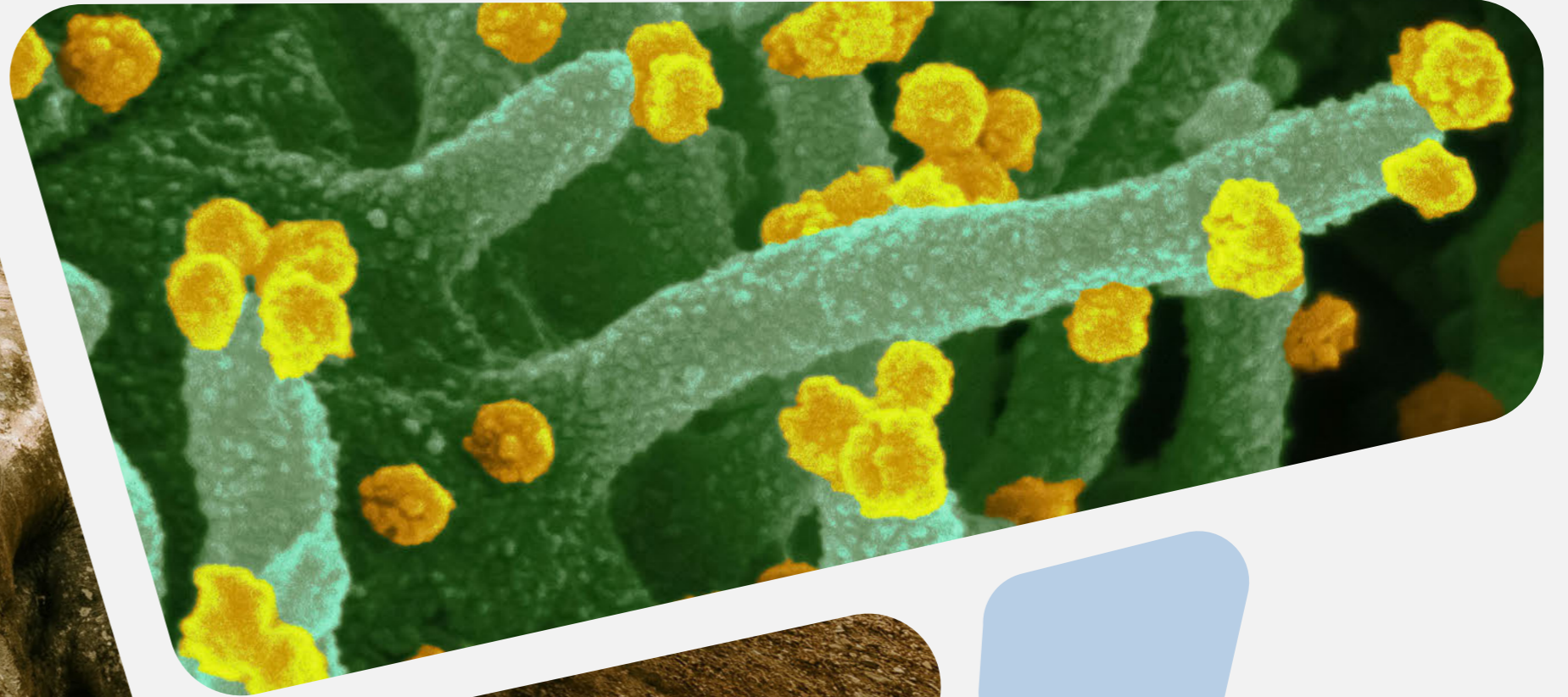
Sofia Grade

Institute of Molecular Biotechnology

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Christine Capper

European Huntington's Disease Network



Oncology

Can we exploit RNA splicing vulnerabilities for the design of novel treatments across cancer types?

The *RBM10* gene codes for a protein that affects the regulation of the genetic material in processes related to development, heart function and inflammation. Some tumours have alterations in this gene.

Specifically, *RBM10* has mutations in 10% of lung cancers, 5%-8% of bladder cancers and 5% of pancreatic cancers. Together, these amount to 1.5 million new cases a year worldwide.

After analysing the role of this gene in lung cancer, the project is now investigating the consequences of inactivating *RBM10* in bladder and pancreatic cancer tumours to identify new therapeutic targets and slow their progression.

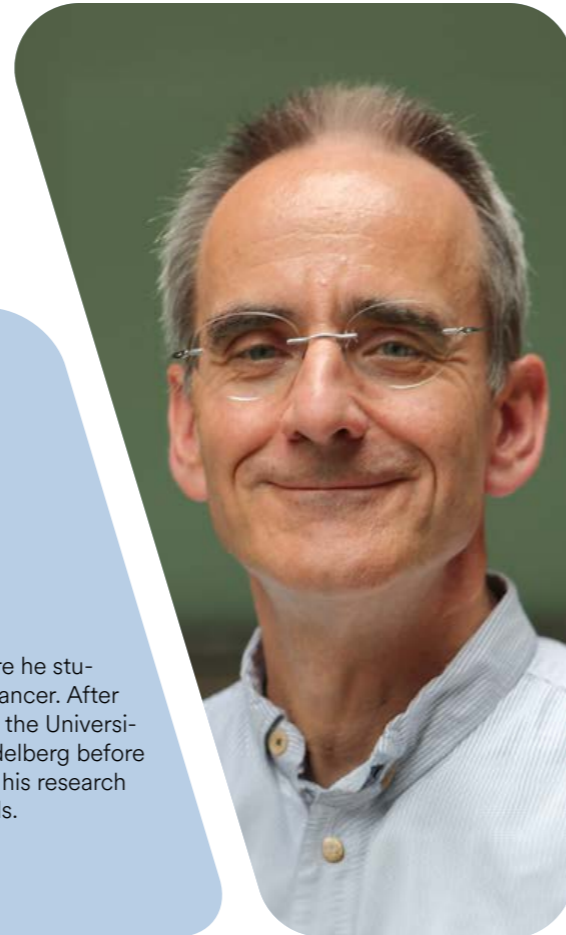
PROJECT LEADER

Juan Valcárcel

Centre for Genomic Regulation

Pre-mRNA splicing regulation in cancer

Juan Valcárcel is an ICREA Research Professor at CRG in Barcelona, where he studies molecular mechanisms of pre-mRNA splicing and their alterations in cancer. After a PhD at the Centro de Biología Molecular Severo Ochoa and a postdoc at the University of Massachusetts, he started his independent group at the EMBL in Heidelberg before joining the Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG). During his whole career, his research focus has been RNA processing, in viruses, *Drosophila* and mammalian cells.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Francisco X. Real

Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncológicas

Molecular mechanisms of pancreatic and bladder cancer

Francisco X. Real is Senior Group Leader at CNIO and Acting Director of the Tumor Biology Program. Trained as a medical oncologist at Memorial Hospital, New York, where he was a staff physician, he returned to IMIM, Barcelona, where he set up a new research programme in cancer cell and molecular biology. His laboratory has focused on the cell and molecular biology of pancreatic and bladder cancer, combining the use of genetic mouse models, organoids and patient samples, and applying multi-omics data analysis.

How do long non-coding RNAs contribute to colorectal cancer development?

Colorectal cancer is the second most frequent tumour in men and women in Spain and among those with the highest incidence in the world. Many of these tumours have DNA replication problems, which cause damage in their genome.

It has recently been observed that long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs), molecules that regulate gene expression, contribute to cancer cells' ability to replicate.

The project investigates how lncRNAs influence the development of colon cancer, knowledge that will help identify new therapeutic strategies against this type of tumour.



PROJECT LEADER - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Maite Huarte

Fundación para la Investigación Médica Aplicada |
Centro de Investigación Médica Aplicada

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Fernando Moreno

Centro Nacional de Biotecnología

Single Molecule Biophysics, DNA repair, replication & organisation

Fernando Moreno-Herrero is a CSIC Research Professor and molecular biophysicist specializing in single-molecule technologies to investigate key biological processes that involve DNA/RNA-protein interactions and the mechanics of nucleic acids. His expertise includes atomic force microscopy imaging and manipulation techniques such as optical and magnetic tweezers, often combined with fluorescence methods. His research focuses on fundamental aspects of DNA replication, organization and repair.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Oscar Llorca

Centro Nacional de Investigaciones Oncológicas

Structural biology and cryo-electron microscopy

Oscar Llorca investigates macromolecular complexes using cryo-electron microscopy to reveal their 3D structure in action. He is especially interested in the complexes that act on DNA and RNA, especially those involved in DNA repair, as well as molecular chaperones—proteins that help other proteins fold correctly. A challenging goal for his present and future research is to use cryo-EM to understand how the structure of long non-coding RNAs (lncRNAs) determines their role in the cell.



How do proteins that control cell division influence drug resistance in cancer?

The cells of the human body divide 10,000 trillion times throughout life. Tubulins are a family of proteins that assemble into microtubules, which are essential for correct cell division.

For this reason, many of the current therapeutic drugs to fight cancer interfere with cell division, migration and invasion by targeting microtubules.

The project investigates the impact of tubulin and microtubule diversity on resistance to cancer drugs and cancer metastases, two of the greatest challenges to improve patient survival.

PROJECT LEADER

Helder Maiato

Instituto de Investigação e Inovação em Saúde - i3S

Chromosome instability & dynamics

Helder Maiato holds a PhD in Biomedical Sciences from the University of Porto and he is currently a Coordinating Researcher at the Institute for Research and Innovation in Health (i3S) and a Visiting Full Professor at the University of Porto. His research focuses on the mechanisms governing chromosome segregation in normal physiology, disease and evolution, and includes pioneering studies on CLASP proteins which help to understand the mitotic spindle assembly and function.



Why do some tumours respond to immunotherapy while others don't?

Interleukin-8 (IL-8) is a protein that regulates migration to an infection site of immune-system cells such as neutrophils, the most abundant white blood cells and the body's first line of defence.

In cancer, tumours take advantage of this system of attraction to spread into the tissues and multiply uncontrollably, even evading current treatments such as immunotherapy.

The project seeks to demonstrate that the abundant presence of IL-8 together with neutrophil dysfunction are correlated with the weakest responses to immunotherapy, in order to predict the response to certain treatments and find new drugs.

PROJECT LEADER

Ignacio Melero

Fundación para la Investigación Médica Aplicada (FIMA/CIMA)

Cancer immunotherapy

Ignacio Melero is a full Professor of Immunology at the Universidad de Navarra and co-chair of the Department of Clinical Immunology and Immunotherapy at the Clínica Universidad de Navarra. Trained at the Hospital Universitario de la Princesa, Madrid, and at Bristol-Myers Squibb, Seattle, he is also Kidani Professor of Cancer Immuno-Therapeutics at Oxford University. His research focuses on translational research in cancer immunotherapy with cell, gene and monoclonal antibody-based strategies.



Can an immune-restricted gene be co-opted by lung cancer cells to promote tumour development and resistance to immunotherapy?

Lung cancer is the deadliest tumour, with many patients relapsing and more than half developing metastasis despite immunotherapy advances.

PD-1 blocking drugs have significantly improved survival by boosting the immune response against cancer cells. However, new therapeutic approaches are needed.

This project seeks drugs targeting the IL7R protein. IL7R is essential in the development of T cells but is also highly expressed by lung cancer cells, promoting tumour progression and resistance to PD-1 blockers.

PROJECT LEADER

João Barata

Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine

T-cell biology, signalling & cancer

João Barata is Lab Head at GIMM - Gulbenkian Institute for Molecular Medicine and Associate Professor at the Lisbon University Faculty of Medicine, where he chairs Oncobiology. His lab studies signalling in lymphoid cells and how signalling players are deregulated in cancer by cell-autonomous lesions and microenvironmental cues, characterizing novel mechanisms that drive tumour development and identifying genetic and post-translational alterations that promote lymphoid leukaemia.



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

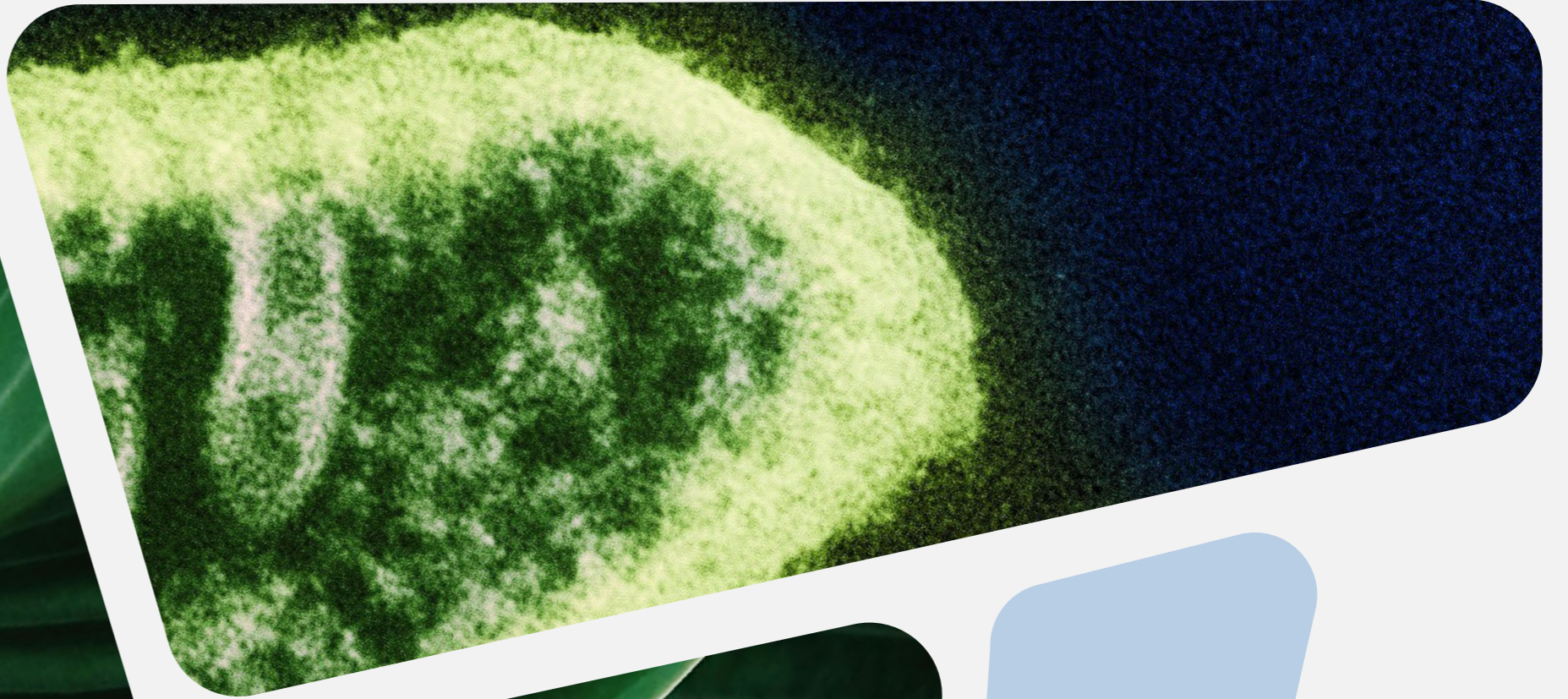
Luis Álvarez-Vallina

Banc de Sang i Teixits

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR - NOT ATTENDING THIS MEETING

Jon Zugazagoitia

Instituto de Investigación Hospital 12 de Octubre



Moderators



Vivienne Parry

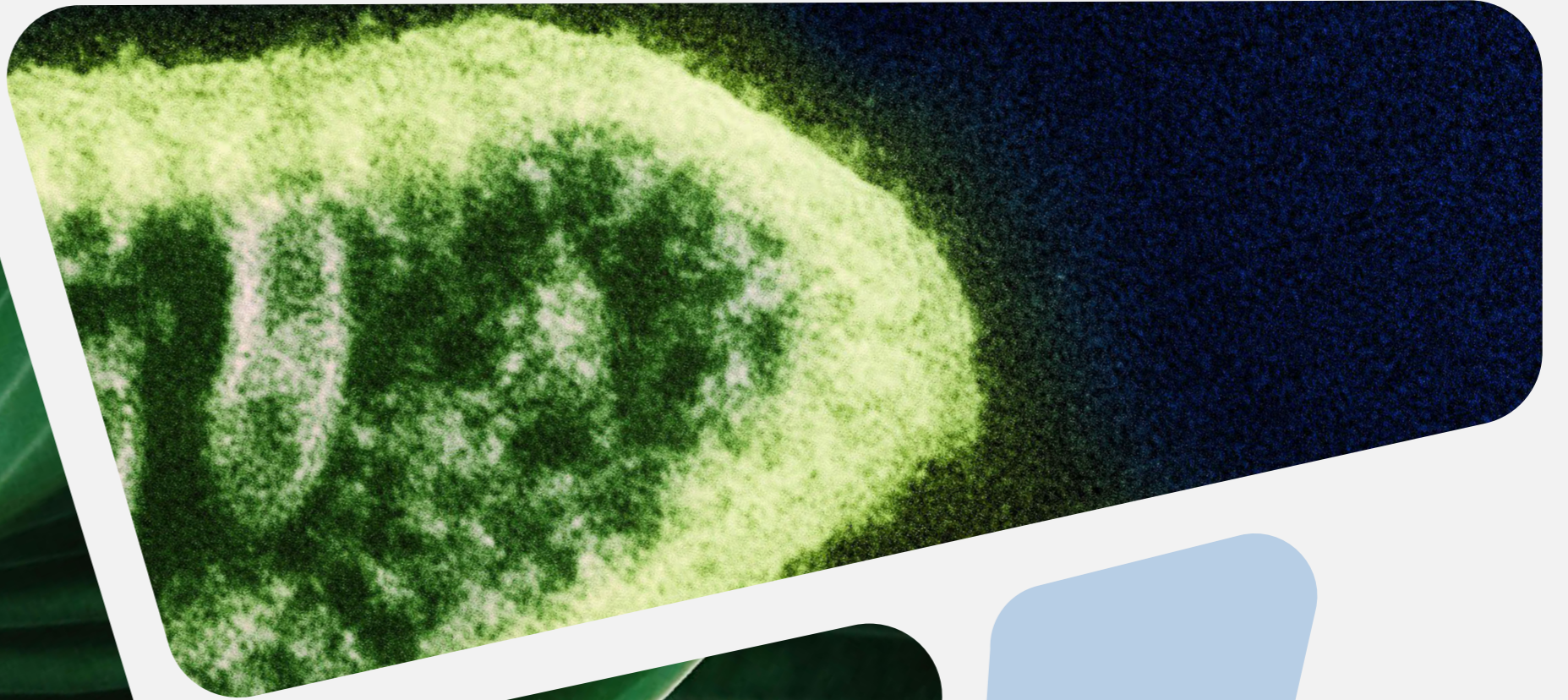
Vivienne Parry is a writer and broadcaster. A scientist by training, Vivienne hosts medical programmes for BBC Radio 4, writes widely on health, presents films, facilitates many high-level conferences and trains young researchers. For over a decade she had a part time role as Head of Engagement at Genomics England which delivered the 100,000 Genomes Project. She was a board member of UK Research & Innovation which is responsible for the strategic spend of the UK's £7 billion research budget and serves as an assessor for the UKRI Future Leader Fellowship.

Silvia Martín Lluesma

Silvia Martín is adjunct professor at CEU San Pablo University and senior clinical director in advanced therapies at VHIO. She was trained at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, the University of Geneva and the Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry in Munich. Her work focuses on the clinical development of cell and gene therapies (TILs, CAR-T, NK) for cancer. She has led pioneering trials and enabled the regulatory approval and implementation of ATMPs in oncology.

Ismael Rafols

Ismael Rafols is a senior researcher at INGENIO (CSIC-UPV, Univ. Politéc. València) and UNESCO Chair on Diversity and Inclusion in Global Science at CWTS (Leiden Univ.). Trained at SPRU (Sussex), the Univ. Barcelona, Tohoku University (Sendai, Japan) and at Cornell University, he studies S&T evaluation, foresight and research strategies. His current focus is on inequities in research priority setting, in particular for societal challenges such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



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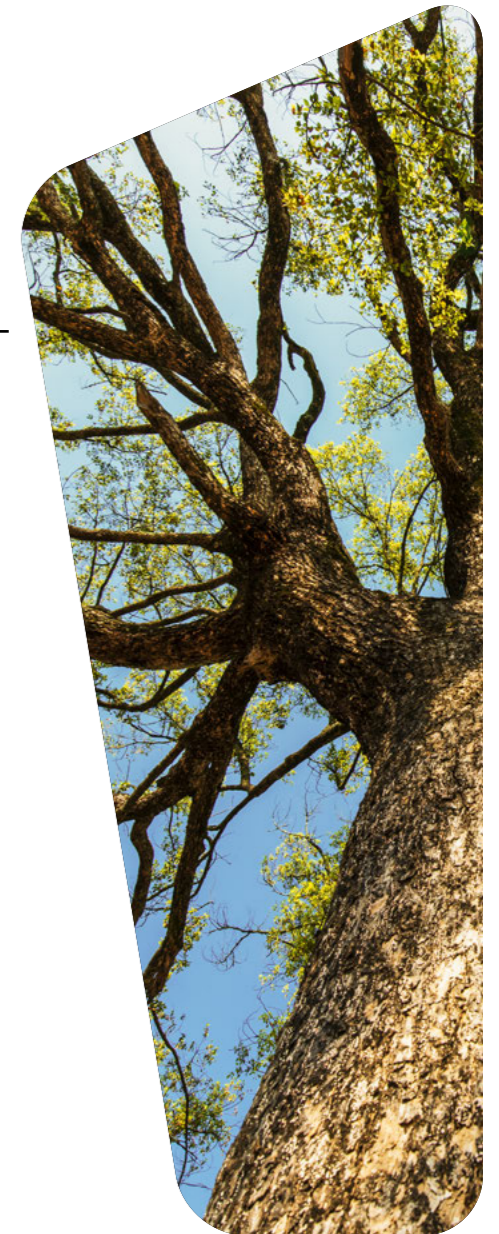
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Health Research Meeting

2025

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