



### A deep dive into schistosomiasis research: Hydra Helminth Conference, Greece 2023

In the picturesque setting of Hydra, Greece, I had the opportunity to immerse myself in cutting-edge helminth research at *Parasitic Helminths: New Perspectives in Biology and Infection*. Initially known as the *Molecular and Cellular Biology of Helminth Parasites*, the conference, which began in 1997, saw a relaunch in 2019 with an expanded focus. Although it has been annually hosted on the island of Hydra since 2002, this was a unique edition, both in terms of content and participation.

#### Key information

- ◆ The conference was limited to 100 attendees, fostering in-depth discussions and stronger connections.
- ◆ Nearly half of the presentations centred on the molecular biology and immunology of NTDs.
- ◆ The format was discussion-oriented, allowing participants ample time to dissect each presentation critically.
- ◆ Special evenings dedicated to poster sessions included "poster pitches," which offered clear insights into the broader work behind the posters, circumventing the usual limitations of printed material.

The smaller, intimate setting was conducive to networking. Having recently transitioned from veterinary to human parasitology, I sought insights and connections in the field of NTDs, primarily schistosomiasis. The participant base represented a broad range of countries, which facilitated valuable interactions with researchers from endemic countries. I had the chance to meet old colleagues from my PhD period and make new connections which I believe can bring promising collaborations in the near future. The small and cosy environment built in this conference certainly facilitates the sharing of information and connection, something that is sometimes challenging in large conferences.

I'm currently a member of the FibroScHot consortium. Our primary goal is to evaluate the effect of administering praziquantel more frequently in schistosomiasis hotspots. It is estimated that approximately 90% of people needing treatment for schistosomiasis live in Africa. Despite mass drug treatment programmes with community treatment coverage exceeding 80% in some areas, some regions like Lake Albert, Uganda, continue to show a high prevalence of schistosomiasis. Our consortium aims to understand the root causes and assess the impact of more frequent praziquantel administration on school aged children in such areas. I presented my work in the form of a poster, which enabled me to engage in in-depth discussions as conference participants viewed posters during designated sessions of the conference. It was really enriching to share my findings and get new perspectives from other participants, especially those who are familiar with schistosomiasis challenges in African countries.

I'd like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the London Centre for NTD Research for accepting my application for a travel grant, which provided me with this opportunity to share my research and discuss potential research collaborations to advance progress towards the 2030 NTD road map targets. It is essential for students and researchers to continually have the opportunity to share their thoughts and create new connections in order to progress in science.

*Kelsilandia Aguiar-Martins, PhD candidate,  
Royal Veterinary College*