

March 7, 2019

Sally Irwin

The AgonOx T Cell Based Immunotherapy: A Deeper Dive III conference was held on Maui February 28 – March 3rd, 2019. It is rare on Maui to have a scientific conference of this level or in this field of study. I attended all three days of the conference along with three UH Maui students who have also been doing research with me in the lab through the INBRE NIH grant that we share with the John Burns Medical School and all the other UH campuses.

This conference concentrated on the mechanisms of T cell responses to infection and cancer cells specifically and how we can and are using our knowledge of these mechanisms to diagnose and more effectively treat different cancers in each patient individually. We heard speakers from several different Universities as well as Cancer research centers and those involved in translational medicine that are taking what has been learned in the lab into the clinic. One of the highlights of the meeting was a talk by Dr. James Allison who won the Nobel Prize in 2018 for his work on T –Cells in Cancer Therapy.

I worked with the students (who are all interested in different fields of life science), ahead of time to review and learn more about the immune system and how it applies to cancer. They all picked two speakers and read some of their papers which we discussed as a group. We also discussed the lectures that we heard each day and went over questions they had. This was a phenomenal and life changing experience for each of them to see the high level of science work being done and hearing the interactions between these scientists (many very close to their same age). I think they all walked away feeling very inspired.

This type of conference is also refreshing and renewing for me. I don't often get to interact with other scientists who are working in research and hear first-hand of what they are learning. I teach about the immune system to varying degrees and implications to cancer in all my classes. This conference enriched my knowledge on this topic greatly and provides me with information on cutting edge science discoveries to present to my students. It also gave me a chance to discuss some of our own research with other scientists and learn about some new tools/techniques that we might be able to apply to our work here at UH Maui College.