



## OPTIMA case study 1

# TransMed: A Student Organized Cross-CDT Conference (#TMSC16)

CREATING A CONFERENCE FOR STUDENTS BY STUDENTS

## Creating a conference

by Holly Fleming and Catherine Lynch (Fourth year OPTIMA students)

In January 2016, 11 students from the EPSRC and MRC CDT in Optical Medical Imaging (OPTIMA) gathered together to organise the first TransMed Student Conference.

Our aim was to host a conference for students, led by students, with the theme of applying physical sciences research to address key challenges in the clinic – as we believe that interdisciplinary research is vital for developing new and effective healthcare technologies. By holding this conference, we hoped to foster connections between students/CDTs with similar research interests across many fields. In order to highlight the potential for collaboration many CDTs from across the UK were invited to participate as well as invitations to non-CDT students whose research fitted with the theme.

The conference attracted some 100 participants and over the two day conference we heard from the three keynote speakers we had invited: Professor Tony James (University of Bath), Dr. Ruchi Gupta (University of Hull), and Professor AP De Silva (Queen's University Belfast). We also heard from Stuart Cantrill, Chief Editor of Nature Chemistry on the nature of scientific publishing.

We had student speakers giving an insight into their PhD research, with topics ranging from smart glasses for macular degeneration patients to fluorescent probes for imaging atherosclerosis. Prizes were awarded to Howard Moshtael (Applied Photonics CDT) and Rachael Cameron (OPTIMA CDT) by an independent committee. The poster sessions gave us an excellent opportunity to network and discuss research ideas. Prizes for the best posters were awarded to Daniel MacDonald (University of Strathclyde), Cian Vyas (CDT in Regenerative Medicine, University of Manchester), and Holly Fleming (OPTIMA CDT)

As an organising committee, we wanted to find a way to break the ice for students just starting their PhD's and so we 'invented' the Poster Technical Challenge! Here delegates were encouraged to explore the posters, find a technique that interested them and then explain this technique to the rest of the delegates on a whiteboard, with the prize won by Mohammed Rupawala (CDT in Physical Sciences for Health, University of Birmingham) with an engaging explanation of an assay based on catalysis.



### Poster Sessions

There were 40 posters from PhD students ranging from looking at neural networks for medical image processing to 3D printing for skeletal tissue engineering.



### Student Talks

Student speakers presented their PhD research and covered a range of areas. These were chosen from the abstracts submitted to the student committee

# Feedback and Path Forward

By Sam Stanfield (Second year OPTIMA student)

## Summary of Feedback

The first thing to note is that both the verbal and written feedback was overwhelmingly positive, so well done everyone involved!

What really came out is how attendees enjoyed the relaxed, friendly and more informal atmosphere, as well as the range of research areas involved and the fact that early-stage researchers could get the feel for conferences and presenting.

The ceilidh, meal and other social outings also featured strongly in people's compliments, as did the stereotypically un-Scottish weather!

The main areas of improvement pointed out were the arrangement of the poster sessions (in that their varying lengths and positions during the day possibly conferred unfair advantages on some students over others), the fact it was slightly chemistry-heavy.

### DELEGATE THOUGHTS ...

*"I really enjoyed Transmed and I believe that the committee did a great job! I hope it will be on every year and I'll be able to attend and present my work! Thank you very much"*

*"Enjoyed all of it! Really liked the mix of student talks and the keynote speakers!"*

*"Posters were really useful to see what other people are doing"*

*"The fun breaks e.g. walks, museum, improved the good vibes for the other aspects e.g. ceilidh, general networking"*

## Next steps

Of course, now that the conference is over, the question becomes "What next?"

We created this conference as a means of bringing together PhD students from CDTs who were interested in translational science.

But we don't want to stop there. We want this to be the start of a network of students establishing the interdisciplinary network of colleagues for our research in the future

It became clear during a led session on this topic at the conference itself, that there was a definite appetite among delegates for an annual event to bring us together.

This event could incorporate:

- ⇒ More interactive sessions
- ⇒ More student participation
- ⇒ Increased involvement of clinicians and engineers as well as scientists

We are now working on compiling a TransMed network mailing list and building a forum so that we, together with students from other CDTs and universities can work together on the next step in the journey.

We are excited to see what happens next!

### TRANSMED CONFERENCE



## Building networks

Plenty of social time at the poster session, during excursions, and icebreakers allowed all students to easily mix and get chatting.



## Keynote speakers

We were fortunate to welcome three excellent speakers to provide some inspiring talks for us.

### DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

"I loved Transmed. The breadth and quality of talks was fantastic and the students created a great atmosphere for networking and discussion. Organising a conference in 4 months is a tall order and I am extremely proud of how well our students did!"

*Dr Colin Campbell  
OPTIMA Director*



