

Report of the training for "Professional Development", held in BSRC "Alexander Fleming" Athens, Greece 2024 April 01-12 d.

After receiving funding from the ICLAS organization for veterinarians and animal users, I chose to visit the Biomedical Sciences Research Center (BSRC) of "Alexander Fleming", Athens, Greece.

The main purpose of the visit was to gain new knowledge and skills in the field of laboratory animal work with the goal of applying these theoretical and practical skills into my personal practice and to help integrate them into the daily work of my academic institution in Lithuania.

I first acquainted myself with the various animal facilities, beginning with the Core Breeding Unit. The biological clean (infectious free) status of this unit is exclusively important and the importance of safety was very apparent. I noted the procedures that staff must follow when working here and the restricted access to animals (i.e. only embryos are transferred).

Afterwards I visited the other facilities, each having its own purpose, and observed their internal structures, conducive to the success of the animal research and to the technicians' work. The main aspects I noticed were as follows:

- Many changing stations
- Inhalation anesthesia systems, wherever needed
- The use of autoclaves, UV water sterilizers and wind chambers
- Clothing specifications
- Bio-safety principles controlling entry and exit of the facility

I was briefed on the documents used at the Centre and the specifics of their completion and use. The Head of the animal facilities and I discussed theoretical and practical implications of the impact, detection and prevention of rodent vivarium infections. I was introduced to the strategies of technical work and research procedures in the BSL-2 unit for infectious disease experiments.

I am a veterinarian, but I am also a researcher, so I was very interested in the scientific part of this research center: the experiments carried out, the methods of analysis and the biological models used.

I appreciate the smooth training plan prepared by my supervisor, which gave me the opportunity to increase my knowledge in the following areas:

1. X-ray imaging and mouse echoscopy
2. Colonoscopy (equipment, procedure, parameters, evaluation of the changes in the tissue)
3. Cytometry (use of the method and analysis)
4. Mice blood analysis (biochemical and morphological blood test and evaluation)
5. Development of transgenic mouse models
6. Mice model of colitis (acute and chronic)
7. Mice model of arthritis (Rheumatoid, Psoriatic and Osteoarthritis)
8. Neuroscience (aspects of the performance of the experiments, equipment and different behavioral tests)

During my visit in "Alexander Fleming" center I participated in student training (theoretical and practical) to see how small procedures are carried out. Along with obtaining a certificate, I observed what the student training system is like in this center.

I was kindly invited to attend the EARA conference dedicated exclusively to Greece. During this meeting, the issues and challenges for scientists, and other professionals, working in the field of laboratory animal research were discussed. The lecture given was about the position and importance of the European Union in animal research in relation to the rest of the world. During the workshop, we were guided in how to develop a good message to the public to explain our personal work on animal research. The right message is needed to be more open to the public, to reduce confrontation and pressure on scientists and researchers and other professionals, as well as to promote the funding and quality of research in Europe and the search for and development of alternative biological models.

I learned about the animal facility management system, which ensures the quality of animal housing and research results. I participated in the training of researchers to work with laboratory animals. I also gained a lot of new information on biological mouse models for the study of: oncological, degenerative, metabolic, immunological and other diseases or disorders.

The good practices I witnessed in BSRC "Alexander Fleming" has given me encouragement to be more active in participating in projects and activities for improving animal management systems in my country's institutions.

I am very grateful to ICLAS for funding my internship. I would like to thank Hanna-Marja Voipio for her care and mediation in choosing the host institution for the training. Also in particular, I wish to thank Dr. Vasileios Ntafis, all his team for being so nice, helpful and professional and scientists from the research groups for sharing ideas, advices and insights.

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