

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Training fellowship awardee: Francesca Biondi, Animal Care Technician in the Neuroscience Institute of National Research Council of Pisa (Italy)

Host institution: IDIBELL Animal Facility, Barcelona (Spain)

Period: from 20th November to 16th December 2019

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the ICLAS European Regional Committee for having granted my training fellowship at the IDIBELL animal facility.

I was interested in the ICLAS ERC fellowship award to perfect my skills in the field of laboratory animal science and acquire greater practical skills in order to advance and enhance my professional training.

There are no such opportunities in my country, which only offers a limited number of very expensive courses with an overly theoretical approach to the topics of my interest, which I do not consider to be of use in the daily management of an animal facility. In Italy, the implementation of the directive 2010/63/EU has been a slow and arduous process, which has threatened to marginalize the already fragile national research system. To this day there are no precise guidelines regarding the training of people who, like me, work with animals, so when I was offered this great opportunity I was determined to take full advantage.

My focus is on mice. In particular the purpose of my visit was to acquire more knowledge about breeding colony management and all related matters and also to gain practical understanding of the techniques for the health screening of colonies and for environmental screening.

I was also interested in all aspects of the organization of a laboratory animal facility: layouts, equipment, functional areas, workflows of animals, personnel and equipment, washing and decontamination procedures and the weekly schedule of technicians.

For these reasons, first, after making contact with the animal facility and its personnel, I started to analyze breeding strategies and techniques for maintaining colonies of transgenic mice, with theoretical explanations always accompanied with practical and concrete observations of the colony. I also received a lot of useful material to learn more about the topic.

I had a special interest in health monitoring, in the interpretation of results and in action plans in case of confirmed infection, receiving valuable advice regarding my own facility in Italy. I also learned more about environmental monitoring and I was directly involved in its execution.

Every day I was increasingly involved in the daily life of the IDIBELL animal facility: I observed the cage change procedure for each room (and strain) and the procedure in the washing area with

the corresponding workflows. I was amazed at how organized the working places and animal care staff were. Very often, involved in their enthusiasm and interest in what they do, I felt eager to go back to start reorganizing my own facility.

I received material and explanations regarding rederivation, techniques of animal tagging, best practices in analgesia and AAALAC accreditation.

For all these things I always had advice regarding the implementation in my own animal facility.

The schedules and cards used by the animal care technicians literally illuminated me.

Moreover, I would like to add that what struck me the most was the high level of structural organization of the facility. It is situated in a building which by no means could be described as modern and is free of barriers, but nonetheless it is able to qualify for AAALAC accreditation. This gives us proof that it possible to overcome architectural weakness and apply best practices even when working conditions are not optimal.

My departure came with an eagerness to go back and improve the animal facility in my institution based on everything I had learned: IDIBELL and all the staff were a great incentive.

Since I came back I have been working hard to try and do all this and I hope that the knowledge and skills acquired through this type of program will guarantee benefits on several levels, each connected to each other.

I am most grateful to ICLAS for giving me this great opportunity, to Doctor Rosa Bonavia Abril for all her stimulating discussions and to her staff for making my stay so productive.