

MEA CMRC conference summary

By Beth Dinbar

The 5th UK CFS/M.E. Research Collaborative (CMRC) annual conference was a two-day event held in Bristol this year. The conference was engaging and covered a range of topics which showcased some of the inspiring research currently going on in this field. The first day of the conference was opened and chaired by Professor Stephen Holgate, who gave an overview on developments in the past year.

The first speaker, Dr Nina Muirhead, gave a poignant talk about her own personal experience of ME/CFS and how important education about ME/CFS is needed for medical students. The day proceeded with a number of different talks from a wide range of research topics, including microRNAs, the UK ME/CFS biobank and cryotherapy. It was uplifting to see international researchers from Spain, Canada, and Poland also tackling the field alongside UK scientists.

The second day was opened and chaired by Professor Chris Ponting, who is currently researching CFS/ME at Edinburgh University. The day was full of interesting talks in many areas, including immunology, inflammation and bioenergetics.

As part of the second day, there was an opportunity to attend a workshop relating to an area of CFS/ME research. I attended the biomedical science research priorities, which was a very productive session. It was interesting to hear opinions from patients and carers, as well as researchers and clinicians. There was a lot of discussion about what patients and carers feel is important for biomedical research, then how researchers and clinicians could address these areas and move forward.

The workshop ended with a list highlighting the most important aspects that should be focused on in this area. The highest priority was to investigate the molecular and cellular explanations for ME/CFS and to find gold standard biomarkers to make diagnosis of the disease easier.

Over the full conference, there was a real focus on how to move forward the biomedical research happening in the ME/CFS field. There was a large focus on the collection of 'big data' from the likes of '-omics' research to help with a potential breakthrough.

Although everyone who attended was aware of the lack of funding in this area of research, this clearly did not deter scientists and clinicians from wanting to be involved. Hopefully, the Medical Research Council will help with funding if ideas for biomedical research are brought forward that are good quality.

It was also great to see representatives from other funding bodies in attendance, such as Versus Arthritis, who would be willing to consider funding in CFS/ME if it is also applicable to other diseases too.

I am grateful to the ME Association for the student bursary which allowed me to attend the conference as I feel even more motivated to advance my career in biomedical sciences in CFS/ME research. I was also able to meet valuable contacts within the CFS/ME research field and I look forward to carrying on my research.

I hope that soon a real breakthrough will happen in this field, to help the patients who suffer with CFS/ME.