Lab Spotlight: Trompouki Lab

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How long have you had your lab?
I have had my lab for four and a half years now. Time flies!

How many members make up your lab? Students/postdocs?
Right now my lab consists of four graduate students, but one is very close to graduating!! This will be the first student graduating from our lab. We have also a postdoctoral fellow and a technician. Finally, a master student and an intern complete the current composition of our team.

What is the major research theme of your lab?
We are working on hematopoiesis, both developmental and adult, using zebrafish, mouse and human cells as models. A bit too much for a small lab, but we think that each model completes the other ones and we are trying to use the strengths of each model and combine them to answer our questions. We are very interested in discovering mechanisms that control hematopoiesis in a spatio-temporal manner. Our goal is to uncover novel layers of regulation and compare their function between development and adult regeneration.

What is the most exciting project in your lab right now?
Right now we are trying to understand the role of retroelements in hematopoiesis. We are very excited about this project because we think that this layer of control has been really understudied so far.

What's your best approach to mentoring students in the lab?
I think the most important element is to teach them to act as a team. The way we approach questions in life sciences right now has become much more complicated comparing to my student years. Different expertise is needed to complete a story. Therefore, learning to work with other people is really important. Additionally, I try to discuss everything with my people and explain the reasons behind my actions. I think that strengthens the sense of a team and helps people envision long-term goals. I also try to keep them motivated and encourage them when the projects take unexpected turns.

What's the biggest accomplishment your lab has had recently?
This period is great for our lab since we are very close to publishing our first paper as a team and we are getting ready for the defense of our first graduate. Additionally, now all the projects are in a fruitful phase and many of our members are getting talks in international conferences. This is scary for the youngest in the group, but also a great motivation!

What is the key to running a successful lab?
Honesty and work ethics are very important together with maintaining a spirit of teamwork. On the other end of the spectrum, good funding and a supportive environment are necessary to ensure success. Luckily, being part of a Max Planck Institute offers us all the above. We are very lucky to be able to complete almost all our experiments in house and interact with amazing scientists of all expertise. Especially the latter is really important, since it is a source of novel ideas. We keep on learning!

What facilities or equipment does your lab absolutely depend on?
We use almost all the facilities in the institute. We have great zebrafish and mouse facilities, deep sequencing and bioinformatics is also very important to us together with cell sorting and imaging.

What has been your greatest challenge in managing your lab?
Since we started all our projects from scratch we were running against time. Luckily, we are now in a position to have established successfully new avenues for investigation and new questions that will keep us busy for the years to come.

What advice do you have for new investigators just opening their lab?
Breathe and have patience. Hiring the right people is important. Try to create a team and put all the people to work together till the lab has the first publication. I think this is really

important and gives you the confidence to continue. Read “simply blood” blogs. Many of the blogs give excellent advice on how to be prepared for opening your lab.

What was the most exciting part about starting your new lab?
Having the absolute liberty to work on your ideas is the essence of this job. Personally, I also find this job very challenging since you have to be a mentor, a manager, a “parent” sometimes, a Public relations person for your own lab and on top you need to get funding and successfully manage your funds. So you are never bored and who doesn’t love a complicated challenge?

Does your lab attend the ISEH annual meeting?
We try to attend as many ISEH meetings as possible. ISEH meetings are my favorite meetings since they are very friendly and have a family quality, which makes getting to know people and new collaborators very easy. It is also great for young people, because ISEH feels like a protective and friendly environment to discuss your science. Last but not least, the science is always top-notch. However, it is an expensive meeting and it is a challenge for a whole lab to attend every year.

What is the most beneficial aspect of ISEH membership for your lab?
Interactions in the annual meeting, being able to read other people’s thoughts, but also express your own through the blog, attend webinars from so many leaders in the field.

How do members of your lab celebrate accomplishments?
Well, going out for drinks is our favorite thing to do. We are also lucky to be close to a big amusement park. Some adrenaline rush is always good for our spirit.

Does your lab have any fun traditions?
Well, people like to count “bad words” that come out of all the lab member mouths. If you reach ten, you have to deed the whole lab.

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Each month, Simply Blood spotlights a lab focused on the research of basic hematology, immunology, stem cell research, cell and gene therapy, and other related aspects. Get to know these different labs around the world! This month, we are featuring the **Trompouki Lab at the Max Planck Institute of Immunobiology and Epigenetics in Freiburg, Germany.**