


# Lab Spotlight: Kent Lab

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ISEH Headquarters

January 3, 2019



## About the PI

David Kent earned a B.Sc. in Genetics and English Literature at the University of Western Ontario, Canada (1999-2003). He obtained his Ph.D. in normal adult blood stem cell biology at the University of British Columbia, Canada (2003-2009) under the supervision of Connie Eaves. Then, he moved to the University of Cambridge as a postdoctoral fellow in the lab of Anthony Green, where he primarily studied malignant blood stem cell biology. In 2015, he

started his own research group at the University of Cambridge. His group studies fate choice in single blood stem cells and how changes in their regulation lead to cancers.

**How long have you had your lab?**

3 years

**How many members make up your lab? Students/postdocs?**

5 students, 3 postdocs, 1 research assistant

**What is the major research theme of your lab?**

Understanding single blood stem cell fate choice

**What is the most exciting project in your lab right now?**

This changes all the time – projects go in phases and almost every one has a long dark tunnel along the way somewhere (sorry to those who are currently in one!). The one that people probably don't associate with our lab is trying to understand the physical biology of single blood stem cells – I've hired two biophysics/bioengineering postdocs and it's definitely brought a different flavour to the lab dynamic. Everyone wants to build something these days!

**What has been your greatest challenge in managing your lab?**

Stepping back a little (sometimes a lot) from the projects. It would be impossible to treat every project like you treated your own postdoc projects and this means you need to build trust with your people and it also means that they need to be in the driver's seat for their project – I am closer to some projects than others and try to be as available as possible but I would definitely say that the hardest thing to do was to avoid simply giving people lists of experiments I would do if it were my project. I've been so impressed by what my people get done when they are given this ownership.

**What advice do you have for new investigators just opening their lab?**

Take your time hiring. The wrong appointment can completely scupper your chances of being productive and a single bad hire can drag everyone down. I've seen it happen in other labs and it is terrifying. I asked more experienced people to help me interview, involved my lab members where possible and generally went with a "hire nice people" rule.

**Does your lab attend the ISEH annual meeting?**

Yes – somebody will usually attend and I try to as well. It's been my favourite meeting since I first attended in Hamburg back in 2007. The balance and topic areas are exactly up my alley – it's not massive like ASH or ISSCR, yet it still spans developmental hematopoiesis through to malignancy. We'll be joining for many years to come!

**What is the most beneficial aspect of ISEH membership for your lab?**

ISEH is like family. People know and support each other and there is a real sense that the most senior figures in the field care about the society, its research, and its trainees. I think it's critical for young scientists in particular to feel that sense of belonging because it holds them responsible to the community – I might be dreaming, but I feel it leads to more collaboration, less scientific fraud and more transparency. After all, you're going to have to face all these people again next year!

**How do members of your lab celebrate accomplishments?**

I think we're pretty standard with "drinks" so far – maybe the next batch of recruits will bring a new set of ideas for how to celebrate.

**Does your lab have any fun traditions?**

Claiming that lab meeting starts at 9 sharp. We try, and we fail... regularly. That's a tradition, right? We also have a "who are you" rule for everyone's first lab meeting – just a little bit on where you come from.

**Interview conducted by:**

*Konstantinos Kokkaliaris*

ISEH Publications Committee Member

Massachusetts General Hospital

& Harvard Stem Cell Institute

Boston, USA

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 **Kent Lab** at the **University of Cambridge** in the United Kingdom.

David is currently the Cambridge Stem Cell Institute's Public Engagement Champion and has a long history of public engagement and outreach including the creation of The Black Hole, a website and blog that provides information on and analysis of issues related to the education and training of scientists.