

COMMENT

ECI Biocommentary: Erdal Sag

Erdal Sag^{1,2}✉



© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to the International Pediatric Research Foundation, Inc 2021

Pediatric Research (2021) 90:711; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41390-021-01636-x>



I was born and grew up in Kutahya, a small city in the mid-west region of Turkey. I had my medical education in Hacettepe University, Faculty of Medicine, in Ankara where I also had my pediatric residency and finally my pediatric rheumatology fellowship. I have always wanted to be a pediatrician since I was a small child. My first role model was my uncle who is a pediatrician and was the only doctor in our family before me.

When I was in the third year of medical school, I met with Prof. Seza Ozen. She became my primary role model and lifetime mentor. She influenced and guided me in academics, and I decided to be a pediatric rheumatologist. I started to attend her journal club, and outpatient clinics whenever I could. I did my first

research under her supervision when I was a last-year medical student on familial mediterranean fever and amyloidosis.

During my pediatric residency, I continued to work in pediatric rheumatology as well. I completed the Master of Science program of Pediatric Autoinflammatory Diseases in the Institute of Child Health, Hacettepe University. I had the privilege to work with Prof. Lucy Wedderburn at her lab in the University College London, with the support of "EULAR scientific training bursary." She was another great figure in my career, I did my first basic science research on muscle biopsies of juvenile dermatomyositis patients under her supervision. I learned a lot about translational research from her. I continued to work on JDM muscle tissue at my home institution, with one of the best pediatric neuromuscular histopathologist, Dr. Beril Talim, who was my pediatric residency thesis supervisor.

Meanwhile, I started to take responsibilities in the international pediatric rheumatology community as well. With a couple of young international colleagues, we set up the EMERGE (EMErging RheumatoloGists and rEsearchers) group, the fellow initiative of PReS (Pediatric Rheumatology European Society). I am still the lead of the Educational Activities and Courses Subcommittee of EMERGE.

I was doing my dream job during my fellowship at Hacettepe University, Department of Pediatric Rheumatology. My seniors, Prof. Seza Ozen and Prof. Yelda Bilginer supported me endlessly during my fellowship. I won the FOREUM International Exchange Fellowship Grant with my project on the effect of T cell exhaustion on the pathogenesis of juvenile idiopathic arthritis. With this grant, I have visited Aarhus University where I met with Prof. Bent Deleuran. He became my supervisor, my second mentor, and my friend, if I may say so. It was a life-changing opportunity, I have learned so many things from him.

When I returned to Turkey, as a part of FOREUM grant and with the support of Prof. Seza Ozen, we established a new laboratory, Pediatric Rheumatology Unit, Translational Medicine Laboratory at Hacettepe University. This is the first ever laboratory dedicated to pediatric rheumatology research in Turkey.

I am truly thankful and indebted to all of my mentors who enlightened my path, supported, and encouraged me during my journey. I want to thank my whole family and especially my amazing wife, Aslihan, who always supported me.

Although I am a beginner in the academic career path, I might advise that following the correct mentors, chasing every opportunity to work in different centers, collaboration with peers and seniors from all over the world, and working hard with passion will give you the energy and enthusiasm you need to get over from all obstacles you may encounter and eventually bring the success.

¹Pediatric Rheumatology Unit, Ankara Training and Research Hospital, Ankara, Turkey. ²Pediatric Rheumatology Unit, Translational Medicine Laboratories, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey. ✉email: sag.erdal@gmail.com