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RĪGA STRADIŅŠ
UNIVERSITY

International Conference

Autoimmune diseases: main problems and solutions Deliverable D6.7

Project number - 952376 – VirA

Project funded by the European Union		
Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other program participants (including the Commission Services)	
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	

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Summary

The international conference “Autoimmune diseases: main problems and solutions” was organised within the framework of the project “Reducing networking gaps between Rīga Stradiņš University (RSU) and internationally leading counterparts in viral infection-induced autoimmunity research (VirA)” that is supported by the European Commission Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. The conference took place on 9 – 10 November 2023 at Rīga Stradiņš University Hippocrates Lecture Theatre, 16 Dzirciema Street, Riga, Latvia.

The two-day conference was attended by broad spectrum of participants including academics, professors, researchers, clinicians and students. Participants represented Rīga Stradiņš University, University of Ferrara, Sheba Medical Centre, Ulm University, University of Würzburg, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Warsaw Medical University, CSL Vifor, Switzerland, Paediatric Children Onco-haematology Centre, Lithuania, Tartu University, Tartu University Hospital, Ministry of Education and Science, Latvian Institute of Organic Synthesis, Riga East Clinical University Hospital, Institute of Food Safety, Animal Health and Environment “BIOR”, Latvian Multiple Sclerosis Association, Latvian Biomedical Research and Study Centre, P.Stradiņš Medical College of the University of Latvia, Children’s clinical university hospital, Latvia and Institute of Stomatology. Total number of participants was 102 (83 in person at Rīga Stradiņš University and 19 - remotely via Zoom Platform) (Figure 1 - 6).

The conference was conducted in accordance to the VirA project plan, that aimed to gather in person ~100 participants from the Baltic States and from the research institutions over European Union. On the second day, a special session on VirA achievements was held.



Figure 1. Opening of the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”



Figure 2. Day 1 of the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”



Figure 3. Poster session of the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”



Figure 4. Day 2 of the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”



Figure 5. VirA project External Advisory Board evaluation on day 2 of the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”



Figure 6. VirA project banner and flags of countries represented in the International Conference “Autoimmune Diseases: Main Problems and Solutions”

International knowledge transfer experts were involved in conference planning, dissemination of information between research staff of participating institutions, selection of speakers and preparation of conference abstract book. 82 participants working in the field of autoimmune diseases attended the conference: 62 from the Baltic States, 16 from research institutions in the European Union and 6 researchers from Israel. Number of participants from the project partner countries, as well as other close regional actors were offered travel cost reimbursement.

The organizing committee and scientific committee consisted of the project coordinator, other co-coordinators and international knowledge transfer experts, who were responsible for speaker evaluation.

Scientific committee:

Yehuda Shoenfeld – Prof., Sheba Medical Center, Israel

Marion Schneider – Prof., Ulm University, Germany

Dario Di Luca – Prof., University of Ferrara, Italy

Roberta Rizzo – Prof., University of Ferrara, Italy

Zaiga Nora-Krūkle – Leading Researcher, RSU, Latvia

Angelika Krūmiņa – Prof., RSU, Latvia

Sandra Skuja – Leading Researcher, RSU, Latvia

Simona Doniņa – Leading Researcher, RSU, Latvia

Modra Murovska – Leading Researcher, VirA Project coordinator, RSU, Latvia

Santa Rasa-Dzelzkalēja – Leading Researcher, RSU, Latvia

Organising committee:

Modra Murovska – Project coordinator, RSU, Latvia

Asja Lunga – Project administrator, RSU, Latvia

Alise Ozola – Project manager, RSU, Latvia

Santa Rasa-Dzelzkalēja – Work package No. 6 leader, RSU, Latvia

Yuri Ostrinski – Autoimmunity Projects Manager, Sheba Medical Center, Israel

Aigars Červinskis – Webmaster, RSU, Latvia

Conference abstracts were published in abstract book available here:
https://dspace.rsu.lv/jspui/bitstream/123456789/14984/1/RSU_VirA_konf-2023_ISBN-9789934618338.pdf

Conference was disseminated via e-mail, RSU webpage, VirA webpage, social media (Facebook

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0hZhtetLHHSyRs6HVdAaJuUjY3zzbTPSazJLSyx8AzMv6HuKeQiusnd3JGAUiRRhxl&id=100031453283000 and

LinkedIn [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/riga-stradins-university_eufunds-horizon2020-project-activity-7100471980893626368-](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/riga-stradins-university_eufunds-horizon2020-project-activity-7100471980893626368-cfan/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)

[cfan/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop](https://eatris.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions/)), EATRIS webpage [https://eatris.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-](https://eatris.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions/)

[and-solutions/](https://www.rsu.lv/en/news/rsu-will-host-international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions) as well as RSU newsletter and via the press release: [https://www.rsu.lv/en/news/rsu-will-host-international-conference-autoimmune-](https://www.rsu.lv/en/news/rsu-will-host-international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions)

[diseases-main-problems-and-solutions](https://www.rsu.lv/en/news/rsu-will-host-international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions). Banner is depicted in figure 7.

Information on the conference is available on the VirA project website following this link: [https://vira-twinning.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-](https://vira-twinning.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions)

[main-problems-and-solutions](https://www.rsu.lv/en/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions) and in Rīga Stradiņš University web-page [https://www.rsu.lv/en/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-](https://www.rsu.lv/en/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions)

A full recording of the conference has open access on the VirA project website following this link: <https://vira-twinning.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions>



Figure 7. VirA conference dissemination banner

Agenda

Agenda of the conference is available at the VirA project webpage and depicted in the following section “Agenda”.

https://vira-twinning.eu/sites/default/files/imce/agenda_9-10_november_2023-riga-latvia.pdf

Abstract book

Abstract book is available at the webpage: <https://vira-twinning.eu/events/international-conference-autoimmune-diseases-main-problems-and-solutions>

Evaluation of the conference

According to the survey (37 respondents) the overall assessment of the conference (from 1 = insufficient to 5 = excellent) was 37 responses, average rating 4,68.

Conference attendants mentioned as the most interesting or **useful topics of the conference:**

1. Widespread projects’ achievements, microbiome and diseases, ME/CFS, long COVID, autoantibodies, microRNAs, COVID section and the role of wastewater in the spread of infection, viruses and autoimmunity, adverse events in treatment, understanding the infectious origin of autoimmunity from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, possible role of EBV in the pathogenesis of oral lichen planus, contemporary view on autoimmunity, insights of research in autoimmune diseases treatment.

2. Participants comment that each topic was interesting and, in its place, or almost all with some exceptions, gave new ideas for further researches.
3. Participants evaluate that all the lectures were valuable and currently relevant. Most interesting **Dr Bhupesh Prusty**, Senior Researcher, University of Würzburg, Germany, “Understanding the Infectious Origin of Autoimmunity from the SARS-CoV-2 Pandemic”; **Marion Schneider**, Professor, Ulm University, Germany, “Functional Single Nucleotide Polymorphisms (Snps) Linked to Autoimmune Manifestations in Long COVID”. **Prof Yehuda Shoenfeld’s** lecture; **Edgars Vasilevskis** “Integrative Medicine Approach in the Treatment of Autoimmune Diseases”
4. Participants also mentioned such aspects as good as organization and content of the meeting, that the practical aspects were very useful, possibility of communication with other participants, presentations from visiting researchers.

All respondents (100%, n=37) confirmed that the conference achieved the programme objectives.

Figure 8 shows answers to the question:

Did the conference achieve the programme objectives?

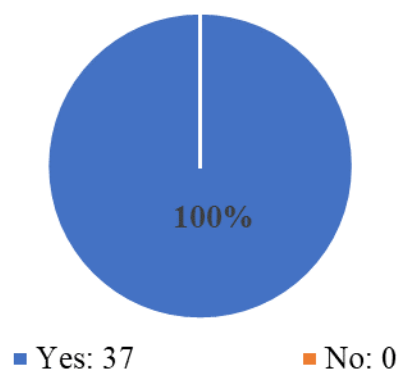


Figure 8 Did the conference achieve the programme objectives?

Did knowledge and information gained from participation in this event meet your expectations?

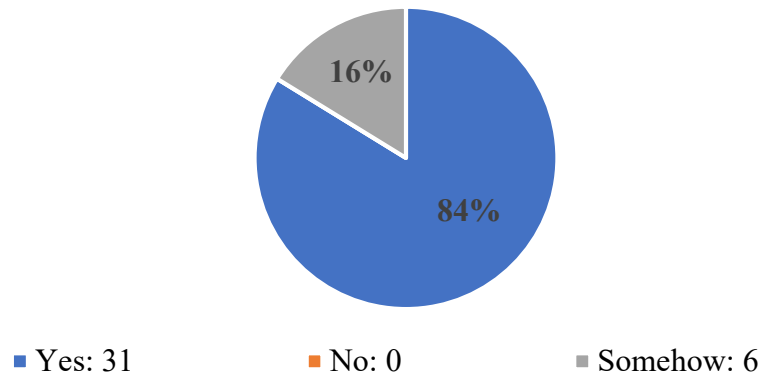


Figure 9 Responses to the question: Did knowledge and information gained from participation in this event meet your expectations?

Comments (also some not understandable for conference)

1. Separate section for young researchers.
2. More reports orientated to practical medicine.
3. When planning events of this scale, it would be necessary to provide more time for discussions.
4. Do not permit lecturers to make political statements! This is scientific conference, no reason to include politics.
5. More spreading of the conference for students at the university to make it possible for them to participate.

Suggestions:

It would be great to have lectures (presentations) that are oriented to self-obtained data and not only literature-oriented, more similar conferences at RSU, more online performance, networking (during the breaks it was possible), attracting more participants for poster session. In the future to include more topics where theory meets clinical manifestations, keep the schedule tight. It would be cool to skip the 2 min intro of each presentation with formal "thank you for the invitation" scheduling a proper discussion-session after 4-5 presentations would be nice.

Conclusions

The conference "Autoimmune diseases: main problems and solutions" was held in accordance with the project plan and reached the set aims gathering 102 stakeholders in the field of autoimmune diseases at the two-day international conference.