

Siena, 06 May 2021

Dear members of the selection committee,

in this letter you will find a brief account on my research path and on the reasons that motivate me to apply for Junior Faculty.

I am a B cell immunologist. I have been very mobile and got exposed to a multitude of scientific environments (Italy, Switzerland, Germany, UK). Starting from my graduate studies, my research has been focused on various aspects of B cell biology: vaccinology, antibody response against pathogens and B cell disorders. In 2014 I started studying B cell tumours and became quite close to the translational branch of immunology and hematology. I studied how tumour B cells evade killing by cytotoxic T cells (Cell Reports 2016, Science Signaling 2020) and how inhibitory receptors modulate B cell signaling (Blood 2017). In my work I bridge the expertise in gene editing and expression in hard-to- manipulate primary B cells, study of organelle biology, -OMICS technologies, and bioinformatics. In 2019 I opened an independent laboratory at the Toscana Life Sciences Foundation, one of the most technologically advanced biomedical institutes in Tuscany.

I see three critical aspects to which I would like to contribute as a member of the SIICA Junior Faculty.

- Misconnection between junior immunologists in Italy

I guess I won't be very wrong by saying that there is a general problem in Italy of not knowing what the lab next door is doing. This becomes worse if we think about immunology labs spread throughout the country. I hardly know anyone working in B cell field in Italy, while I know B cell labs at the European and international level. I guess, we should tackle this problem. One of the solutions could be an organization of SIICA seminars with presentations from junior researchers (PhD students – postdocs – junior PIs). Seminars could be divided into series dedicated to different fields: B cell seminars, DC seminars, etc.

I greatly appreciated your idea of launching a series of seminars which involved well known senior speakers. It is a great idea because juniors should be exposed to good scientific talks. But it does not solve the problem mentioned above. We would need additional seminar series which could be easily organized in a virtual format.

- Diversity and inclusion aspects

For 2 years now I have actively involved in the activities of the European Hematology Association (EHA). This is a very big organization connecting basic, translational and clinical researchers studying blood homeostasis and disorders. To give you an idea about our numbers, consider that our annual congress gathers more than 10k participants.

Currently, I am the vice-chair elect of the Young EHA committee and am a founding member of the EHA Taskforce of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Collectively, at these committees we are struggling to promote the inclusion of YOUNG researchers into "senior" EHA activities and of EXCLUDED GROUPS ("women question", minority groups, middle income EU countries) into the EHA politics in general. This is not an easy task, but it is highly motivating and teaches you a lot about all the "hidden" processes that crucially determine what benefits members obtain from societies. Also, being a mum of two small children, I faced childcaring necessities during my transition towards

independent carrier and am very sensitive to “parents in science” question. We are actively addressing it at EHA as well.

I would be more than happy to share my experience in these matters that with the Junior Faculty.

- Poor knowledge about funding and training opportunities coming from adjacent fields

We have serious issues in Italy with funding and training opportunities for junior researchers. Sometimes, such opportunities could be spotted in adjacent fields, but no one knows about them. For example, immunology and hematology are closely connected, but basic immunologists don't really know that societies such as EHA offer very exciting funding and training opportunities to junior researchers. Other societies like ESMO (oncology) also deal a lot with immunology and may have other resources which we don't know about. We need to have more connections with other societies and inform SIICA juniors about emerging opportunities.

Looking forwards to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Anna

<https://www.toscanalifesciences.org/en/projects/tumourimmunology/>