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The “French Germinal Center Club” of the French Society for Immunology: a dynamic collaboration between researchers passionate about the germinal center reaction

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Thematic

The antibody response and B cell memory development are major effector arms of the immune system. They both rely on the selection of B cells in specific anatomical structures called germinal centers (GC). GCs are not only sites for clonal B cell expansion but also the places where the antibody repertoire diversifies following somatic hypermutations and class switch recombination. CD4⁺ T cells that are present in GCs guide the stringent cell selection of high-affinity B cell variants. They can be divided in two functional cell subsets: T follicular helper (Tfh) and T follicular regulatory (Tfr) cells. Furthermore, follicular B and T cell subsets are in close contact with specialized stromal cells allowing cell migration, adhesion, and participating in B cell selection mechanisms. Importantly, on top of their essential role as orchestrators of protective immune responses against infections, GCs have also been involved in diverse pathological conditions including autoimmunity, allergy, and cancer. The great complexity of these structures means that GC aficionados encompass researchers working on a very large palette of topics including in depth analysis of the immune cell types cited above, characterization of cell interactions between GC immune and/or mesenchymal cell subsets, as well as deciphering disease physiopathology. The great versatility of these research foci means that the GC field is extremely dynamic and multidisciplinary. However, because there are many scientific topics addressed when studying GC and

despite a consequent number of teams interested in this field, events centered only on GCs allowing researcher interactions are quite rare.

Aims of the French Germinal Center Club

The French Germinal Center (FGC) club (<https://immunology.fr/en/club/club-centres-germinatifs/>) (Figure 1) is a recently constituted club of the French Society for Immunology (SFI: Société Française d'Immunologie), created in 2018 following a successful initial meeting organized in Rennes in 2017. This club focuses its attention on key advances in the field of GCs with the goal of fostering discussions and exchanges between experts in immunology, molecular biology, vaccinology, oncology and autoimmunity, creating an interdisciplinary environment where the GC is the main topic. Some of the critical topics that are covered include: antibody functions, T cell help, B cell maturation, novel technologies, antibody therapies, GC dysfunctions in diseases, ageing and vaccination; and both basic and clinical findings are discussed. The principal aim of our club is to create a French network of GC enthusiasts to potentialize scientific collaborations in our field of interest between young principal investigators, young researchers with a post-doctoral position or PhD students, as well as senior researchers. To achieve this goal, the FGC club proposes scientific meetings where GC experts can share the last discoveries in the field. We have so far organized FGC club symposia in 2017 and 2018 and a congress session during the last SFI annual meetings in 2019, allowing young and promising researchers or clinicians to present their findings. Our club strongly encourages close interactions between young and senior researchers. For this purpose, we will soon release a web platform designed to facilitate exchange of protocols, in addition of the edition of bi-annual newsletters that will inform on the future national and international meetings in the field, as well as potential financial calls for which consortia could emerge in order to apply. An additional aim of this club is to connect and collaborate with European researchers and with other European Societies of Immunology. Close ongoing collaborations exist with valuable researchers from United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland. As of now, they are mainly at the personal level of some FGC club members, we thus aim to build new interactions with other European scientists and immunology societies at the level of the FGC club.

FGC symposia

The FGC club organizes a scientific event each year in a different French city with these main guidelines: i) encouraging young researchers from basic and clinical research to present and to meet, ii) 20-min presentations by international invited speakers that promote advances in GC knowledge, potentially including unpublished data, iii) followed by 10-min questions and deep discussion with the assembly, iv) all the meeting is entirely organized in English and is open to researchers from everywhere. By now, two one-day symposia have been organized in Rennes (France) in June 2017 and Toulouse (France) in October 2018. These two first events gathered about 100 international participants, predominantly from France and United Kingdom, but also from Portugal and Switzerland. The second symposium held in Toulouse (Figure 2) begun with a special keynote presentation on memory B cells by Pr Jean-Claude Weill from Paris, followed by nine presentations from European speakers from France, United Kingdom and Switzerland, among whom postdocs and principal investigators. This event was sponsored by several organizations, and in particular by the French foundation for cancer research (Foundation ARC pour la recherche sur le cancer) and European molecular biology organization (EMBO). In 2019, a special session dedicated to the FGC club was organized during the annual meeting of the French Society for Immunology, in Nantes (France). The 3rd FGCC symposium was scheduled to be held in Paris the 8th of June 2020, but has been postponed to the 7th of June 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It will focus on germinal centers at the crossroads of health and disease.

Contact

All researchers and clinicians interested in this field are encouraged to join the club and to participate to our annual events. For more information on the French GC Club, visit our website (<https://immunology.fr/en/club/club-centres-germinatifs/>), follow our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/FrenchGCCClub/>) or contact us by email at frenchgcclub@gmail.com

FIGURES

Figure 1: FGC club logo



Figure 2: FGC club symposia in Toulouse in 2018

Keynote Speaker:
Jean-Claude Weill
 INEM, Paris, France

Speakers:
Michelle Linterman
 The Babraham Institute, Cambridge, UK
Carolyn King
 University of Basel, Switzerland
Pierre Milpied
 CIML, Marseille, France
Manuel Diaz-Munoz
 CTPP, Toulouse, France
Marion Espéli
 Saint-Louis Hospital, Paris, France
Meryem Aloulou
 CTPP, Toulouse, France
Hélène Dumortier
 IBMC, Strasbourg, France
Alice Denton
 The Babraham Institute, Cambridge, UK
Patricia Amé-Thomas
 MICMAC, Rennes, France

Organizers:
 Michelle Linterman (Cambridge, UK)
 Nicolas Fazilleau (Toulouse, France)

Contact:
 nicolas.fazilleau@inserm.fr

Friday
October 5th 2018
 9:30AM-5:30PM

Muséum de Toulouse
 35 allées Jules Guesde
 TOULOUSE
 FRANCE

 A group photograph of ten individuals, including the keynote speaker and speakers, standing on a stage. They are dressed in professional attire. The background is a dark stage setting with a screen displaying the event information.