

DEAN'S OFFICE

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Dean for Academic Affairs

PARTICIPANTS
Personnel in training:
Daniela Cerezo, Marta Contreras, Ana Cuadrado, Nicolás Cuesta, Adrián del Rincón, David Olmeda, Cristina Tejedó, Fernando Pozo



One of the key missions of the CNIO is to ensure the most productive scientific environment for our personnel in training. This is a main commitment of our faculty, since over 60% of the work force at our institution are undergraduate students, predoctoral and postdoctoral fellows, medical residents and a broad spectrum of visiting scientists. We also have a variety of exchange and visitor programmes. In this context, we are most grateful to the *Fundación Jesús Serra*, for their continuous support to strengthen career development programmes at the CNIO.

As for other research centres, and as is the case for the population at large, the COVID-19 pandemic has represented

a challenge for the CNIO. We had to set safety measures, reorganise our teams and prioritise efforts but, still, our commitment to our investigators remained undeterred. After a short break, our weekly Progress Report seminars by students and postdocs proceeded in a virtual format, allocating time and resources for formal feedback sessions afterwards. Distinguished speaker seminars were also reinstated, so CNIO personnel could attend in a remote manner. We recognised, however, that this SARS-CoV2 situation took a personal toll. Therefore, we organised a Meet-the-Expert online session with a professional coach precisely on the topic of “Recognising and overcoming stress at the workplace”.

Staff/Faculty:
Nabil Djouder, Rafael Fernández-Leiro, Eva González-Suárez, Óscar Llorca, Ana Losada, Lola Martínez, Jorge L. Martínez, Francisca Mulero, Héctor Peinado, Manuel Valiente

We also kept our outreach activities active, one of the most exciting being the *Marie Skłodowska Curie European Researchers' Night*. This was our seventh participation in an event happening in various countries in Europe and in multiple centres in Spain. Our contribution at the CNIO was “*Meet a Scientist, Become a Scientist*”, this time in a virtual format. The event was a tour-de-force from an organisational perspective, but truly rewarding. In brief, we set up a “research kit” with informative material that was mailed to over 250 registered guests so they could perform an experiment in their own homes, following and talking live with our scientists. It was a wonderful experience that we will certainly repeat in the future.

Another highlight of the year was our Annual CNIO Lab Day, in 2020 celebrating its 10th anniversary. This also took place online, but was quite special. An online ePoster session was set up, whereby a record high of over 85 communications were discussed among CNIO members so that they could showcase their projects and get feedback. Some of the “best-to-come” in each of the scientific programmes of the Centre were selected for video presentations and also for oral discussion. Importantly, we wanted to celebrate this Lab Day with CNIO alumni. We were fortunate (and proud) of seeing how Marta Shahbazi, co-founder of the CNIO PhD Students Association, and Donatello Castellana, leader of CNIO-Postdocs, have progressed to very productive careers at the University of Cambridge (UK) and at the CIC bioGUNE, respectively. Similarly exciting was to hear from Cristina Mayor (trained in Oscar Fernández-Capetillo's Group), on the quite successful projects she is developing in her new laboratory at the Institute for Research in Biomedicine (IRB, Barcelona). We were also inspired by Damià Tormo, trained in the Melanoma Group in our Centre, seeing how he has set up multiple and highly successful start-up companies and a hedge fund, as well as the not-for-profit Columbus Foundation (USA) in support of children with rare diseases. Not less impressive was to learn from Ignacio Dolado, once at the laboratory of ex-CNIO investigator Ángel Nebreda, and now leading Global Medical Oncology programmes at Roche (Switzerland).

A main highlight of Lab Day was the announcement of the recipients of our “*Director's List Awards*”. These are recognitions for outstanding contributions made by our personnel in 3 categories: (1) predoctoral fellows with publications of the highest scientific impact; (2) excellence in research by postdoctoral and staff investigators; and (3) altruistic volunteering to further the mission of the Centre related to training, scientific divulgation, and outreach.

1. Awards to Excellence in Research by Predoctoral Fellows

We are grateful to the Agüera-Nieto family for a generous donation in the name of their mother Antonia Nieto to support an award to acknowledge the PhD student authoring the article with the highest impact in a scientific journal. In 2020 the “*Antonia Nieto Award*” went to Daniela Cerezo for an impressive work in *Nature Medicine* on new discoveries on the modulation of the immune system in cancer. Additional awards in the PhD category went to Marta Martínez Lage (*Nat Commun*), Isabel Ferrara-Romeo (*Nat Commun*), Laura de Esteban Burgos (*Proc Natl Acad Sci USA*), and María Santos (*Genet Med*).

2. Award to Excellence in Research by Postdoctoral/Staff Investigators

The awardee was Bárbara Oldrini for exciting new findings in acquired resistance to chemotherapy in gliomas (*Nature Communications*).

3. Outstanding Contribution to Outreach and Awareness

The recipient was Ana Cuadrado for her continued contribution as a volunteer in the various activities related to dissemination of science to society carried out by the CNIO, such as European Researchers' Night, among others. The award was presented by Javier López Sedó, from the *Fundación Humanismo y Ciencia*, which in 2020 signed a collaboration agreement with CNIO Friends.

The Lab Day proceeded with additional Awards from the Dean's Office for the Best Oral presentations and the Best Posters. The closure included yet an additional Award for T-Shirt Design, this year to Alberto Cascón for an emotive “Imagine a world without research”. It was beautiful allegory that illustrates the impact of science on human health (whether in SARS-CoV2 infections or cancer).

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly impacted our Groups personally and scientifically, but the commitment at CNIO is to continue being at the forefront of research in cancer, and to strive in our commitment to promote our young investigators and help them succeed.