

2018 CMRC Conference Report

by William Rochira

I was fortunate enough to have been one of six students to receive a bursary from the ME Association, which covered my ticket to the conference, as well as expenses for travel.

I found the CMRC conference exceptionally interesting and thought provoking. The speakers were all excellent, and a wide range of study was covered for a condition with so few research opportunities. Subjects of talks ranged from scientific (biomedical) topics, such as studies on biomarker-identification, to socio-political topics, like “the economic impact of CFS/ME”, by Dr Rachel Hunter. All of the talks were extremely accessible; for each presentation, the science was described in-depth and then summarised clearly such that the results and significance of the research was clear and understandable to everyone. There was plenty to think about after each presentation, as the link between science and politics is so clear for CFS/ME.

One of the things I appreciated most about the conference was that as a consequence of its history of poor recognition, everyone in attendance was there because of genuine enthusiasm for the research being presented. Everyone I met was easy to talk to, not just about the conference, but on a personal level. The passion shown towards spreading public recognition and understanding of the condition was so evident in everybody I spoke to, and I felt a real sense of community.

In addition to the talks, the second day featured a selection of workshops. Of three potential options, I chose to go to a workshop on biomedical research priorities, led by Professor Chris Ponting. This provided everybody in the room with a chance to share their input on how the CMRC should prioritise research areas, as well as discuss the scientific, social, and political significance of each area. A variety of viewpoints were shared during the session, and it felt like each was listened to and acknowledged. By the end of the session, real progress had been made, and plans put in place to set up working groups that can focus on each of the points that we had prioritised as a group in the coming months.

Lastly, the venue was outstanding: rooms were comfortable and the food was excellent. There were food and drinks refreshments at every opportunity, and it made the whole event feel relaxed. The drinks reception and evening meal at the end of the first day were relaxing and easy-going; they provided the best opportunity for everyone to talk to the speakers, and just to get to know each other.

This was the first medical conference I ever attended, so I admit that I have little experience to compare it to. However, what I can say for certain is that I will be returning next year, and hopefully again another year to present my own research. Many thanks to the ME Association for providing me with this opportunity.