

John Milner Nutrition and Cancer Prevention Research Practicum Reflection

My main goal in participating in the John Milner Nutrition and Cancer Prevention Research Practicum was to expand my knowledge of cancer research related to nutrition. My research interests are in further understanding the role of nutrition and bioactive compounds in the prevention of chronic diseases, specifically cancer. As a young scientist at the beginning of my doctoral studies, my background lacks extensive cancer related experience.

The practicum at the National Cancer Institute at Shady Grove, initially examined the current challenges and opportunities in nutrition and clinical studies, with discussion of study design and implementation. I learned that while “evidenced based research” shows that nutrition services are of tremendous benefit for cancer prevention, patient access to such services are often limited. I also had the opportunity to hear from Dr. Nigel Brockton from the American Institute for Cancer Research on the most recent recommendations for cancer prevention from the WCRF/AICR Continuous Update Project. The following day, I visited the NIH main campus and toured the National Library of Medicine and the NIH Clinical Center. At the NIH, we attended the Stars in Nutrition and Cancer Lecture: Breaking the Obesity-Cancer Link: New Targets and Strategies by Dr. Stephen Hursting. The lecture was specifically relevant to the work I will be doing for my studies related to obesity and postmenopausal breast cancer. As the week progressed, I heard various experts in the field discuss the effect of vitamins, bioactives, obesity, microbiome and lifestyle interventions on cancer prevention. One of my favorite experiences was the trip to the USDA’s Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center. There, we discussed the process of conducting human feeding studies and toured the clinical research facilities, including the metabolic chambers.

Throughout the week I was also able to network and collaborate with fellow participants on a group project where we designed a research study that would highlight and apply the knowledge we learned throughout the week. On the final day, the groups presented their projects to their peers and a panel of experts. This experience emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication in research. My team received 3rd place for our proposal “Weight Maintenance in Overweight Perimenopausal Women: A Feasibility Study”. By attending the practicum I have now gained an overview of the field of cancer prevention and the current challenges and opportunities. Overall, the experience was enriching and furthered my understanding of cancer

prevention, allowed me to interact with other clinicians and scientists passionate about the field, and provided new possibilities from ideas to collaborations.

