



ACTRIMS 2017

By Laura Kolaczowski

Americas Committee for Treatment and Research in Multiple Sclerosis (ACTRIMS) held its annual meeting last month, and over 800 participants gathered to share their latest work in MS research. I joined Robert McBurney and Hollie Schmidt, respectively CEO and VP for Science of ACP, in attending and presenting a poster, [Initial Characterization of Participants in the iConquerMS™ Network](#). Ours was one of hundreds of posters presented at the conference.

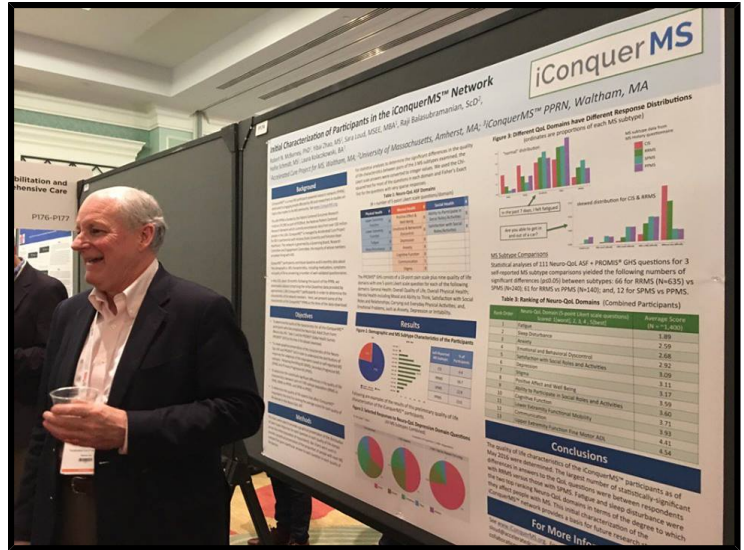
For the uninitiated, a poster presentation is a vehicle employed by scientists or research teams, to present information about their work to other scientists gathered at professional or academic conferences. Typically, the posters are displayed in a separate room or area of a trade show floor. During scheduled "poster sessions," researchers position themselves next to 2' x 4' posters, on which their work is described, while other conference attendees wander around the room, stopping to learn more from presenters about topics that interest them. Those who are presenting walk listeners through their hypotheses, research methods and outcomes and answer questions.



Aside from the poster sessions, there were keynote and other featured speakers, who covered about a range of topics related to current research on MS. As I sat and listened to them, I had to marvel at the inquisitive nature of science and how far we have come in MS research. For example, one group of presentations focused on the human microbiome, our gut and skin, that hosts billions and billions of microbes (or microbiota) that build our defenses against germs and disease. When we are talking about MS, a disease of the central nervous system, what makes a researcher think they should examine poop for clues? It turns out the human gut and how we are processing the food we eat may be complicit in some way with MS, and the severity of the disease course, according to the talks I heard at ACTRIMS.

Multiple Sclerosis in the Age of B Cell Therapy, was shared by Dr. Stephen Hauser, from UC San Francisco, as the opening talk. For some time, Dr. Hauser and a group of his peers, have thought that perhaps treatment of MS should focus on the role of B cells instead of T cells as

our current MS therapies do. Remembering the differences between T and B cells is an ongoing challenge for me (hint: the two types of cells play different roles in helping our bodies eliminate invaders, such as bacteria. T cells directly attack infected cells, whereas B cells primarily produce proteins called antibodies that hijack invaders as they travel in the blood. The function of antibodies is to act as a flag on the infected cell so T cells recognize which cells to destroy). Nonetheless, I did come away from his talk understanding more about the development of a new MS drug, Ocrevus (ocrelizumab), which is currently awaiting FDA approval. This drug will be the first that targets B cells. It has captured additional interest because, if approved, it will also be the first disease modifying therapy for people with Primary Progressive MS (PPMS).



I wrote about the Gut, B Cell Therapy and more, from the presentations at ACTRIMS 2017, and you can find those in my column [Engaging Thoughts](#), published in *Multiple Sclerosis News Today* on February 23. Attending conferences such as ACTRIMS give us the opportunity to share our work with people who otherwise might not be aware of iConquerMS and ACP, and to learn about their research efforts, and network with possible collaborators.

To see our poster on iConquerMS™, click [here](#). Interested in being part of the community contributing to the type of research presented in this poster? Join iConquerMS by clicking [here](#).