

**SCTC Visiting Fellowship Report
Adela-Cristina Sarbu, MD**

Dear Mrs. and Mr., Dear Colleagues,

As a highly motivated physician and young scientist from the department of Rheumatology and Immunology at the University Hospital of Bern (Switzerland), I am very thankful that with the support of the SCTC Benedict Visiting Fellowship grant, I had the great opportunity to visit the University Scleroderma Unit under the direction of Prof. Vanessa Smith in Ghent (Belgium).

The Unit for training in systemic sclerosis and microcirculation of Prof. Smith is a tertiary referral center for patients with systemic sclerosis, with currently about 500 patients under active follow-up. It is a EULAR (European League against Rheumatism) imaging teaching and research center on NVC (Nailfold Videocapillaroscopy) and LASCA (Laser Speckle Contrast Analysis) and not only part of SCTC but also member of the EUSTAR (European Scleroderma Trials and Research group) collaboration and of ERNReCONNET (European Reference Network on Rare Connective Tissue and Musculoskeletal Diseases). This shows the great value on a wide network in the field of systemic sclerosis, of which I could be a part thanks to the SCTC Benedict Visiting Fellowship grant.

During the 4-week stay, I had the opportunity to participate intensively in clinical and scientific activities, with the strong focus on the latter. I have been involved in two main on-going, clinical research projects. The first including the comparison of skin evaluation between patients with early systemic sclerosis and healthy controls by using different methods like durometry, ultrasonography of the skin and LASCA. The second being a longitudinal follow-up project of NVC in healthy children and children with rheumatic diseases, for which we conducted the examinations at a primary school and at the pediatric department of the university hospital in Ghent. This has enabled me to consolidate and deepen my knowledge of the various techniques, some of which I was not yet familiar with. Furthermore, I performed NVC on my own and rated them under the supervision of Prof. Smith for scientific as well as clinical purposes.

I regularly took part in consultations, so I have seen up to 15 patients with systemic sclerosis during the week, with very heterogeneous disease courses. This led me to broaden my clinical experience, including for example the uniform survey of the modified Rodnan skin score. During the weekly interdisciplinary boards with colleagues from cardiology and pneumology, we discussed complicated cases and treatment decisions to ensure optimal care for patients with systemic sclerosis.

Beyond the period of stay, I am currently continuing to participate in a prospective project as a blind rater for NVC. This includes regular online meetings with Prof. Smith and her team to share experiences.

Overall, I would like to thank the SCTC, Prof. Smith and her wonderful team for a valuable and educational experience, which help me on my way to becoming an independent scientist and specialist in the field of systemic sclerosis. I look forward to continuing the great collaboration between the Scleroderma center in Ghent and our university center in Bern with the local support of my mentor and head of the department Prof. Britta Maurer, whom I would like to thank as well.

Sincerely,

Adela-Cristina Sarbu