

The Global Thymus Network: past, present and future

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The Global Thymus Network (GTN) is a series of linked international meetings dedicated to the study of the thymus and T-cell biology (Table 1). The four meetings and organizing regions that compose the GTN are: the Rolduc Workshop (Europe), KTCC (Japan), ThymOz (Australia) and ThymUS (USA). Over time, the participants and organizers of the individual meetings realized that their coordination was both logical and mutually beneficial to all. Therefore, it was agreed that from 2005, each of these meetings should be held every four years, and from this year, the meetings are coordinated by the unified governing board, composed of representative organizers of each of the conferences (see list of authors of this article). Here, we would like to introduce the GTN and highlight the common and specific flavors of the four conferences.

Individual meetings and their histories

The first thymus-centered meeting was the Rolduc Workshop on T-cell biology, originally held in 1989 at the 12th century Rolduc Abbey. Over the years, Hergen Spits and his core Dutch group played a key part in facilitating the organization of Rolduc with researchers from other European countries rotated as the academic organizers. Although T-cell and thymus-centric, Rolduc is known as a 'workshop' for the phenotypic classification of thymus stromal cells and their structural and functional contribution to the microenvironment controlling T-cell development.

The KTCC (Kyoto T-cell conference) was founded by Yoshimoto Katsura in 1991, and is held in the historic city of Kyoto. It has provided an opportunity for researchers in Japan and Asia working on T cells and related fields to exchange scientific ideas through intensive discussions with, and between, internationally acclaimed research groups. KTCC hosts annual domestic meetings and an international workshop once every four years.

The ThymOz (Thymus Australia) series of international conferences was founded by Richard Boyd and Ann Chidgey in 1995, with the aim of creating a stimulating and conducive environment 'down under' that would catalyze a vigorous exchange of recent data, based around the thymus. The first conference was aptly opened by, and in honor of, Jacques Miller. ThymOz is held on Heron Island,

a unique national marine park on the Great Barrier Reef, with attendees ranging from international experts to new students. The sixth ThymOz (March, 2010) will incorporate stem cell biology into the understanding and function of the thymus and the clinical translation of fundamental research.

The ThymUS conference, co-founded by Janko Nikolich-Zugich and Howard Petrie, was first held in 2001, and is focused on countries of the Caribbean region. It was founded as a sister conference to ThymOz, with which it has been coordinated since its inception. Like ThymOz, ThymUS does not sponsor its speakers, but rather subsidizes all attendees, with a special focus on trainees. A characteristic feature of the ThymUS conference is a focus on events that occur within the thymus, and how they affect peripheral T-cell homeostasis and immunity, in addition to disease states such as immunosenescence, autoimmunity and cancer.

Common essential features of the GTN conferences

In addition to the common focus on the formation and function of the thymus, T-cell development and T-cell biology, the four meetings share other important components, which the organizers believe to be vital for successful conferences of this type. First, they each have shorter (~20 min) presentations, eliminating the need for speakers to expend precious time introducing the basic terms and background literature. Second, they all host ~100 to 175 attendees in a single scientific activity, and promote interactions in an informal and comfortable atmosphere, including highly interactive poster sessions. Third, deliberate steps are taken to retain speakers on site throughout the duration of the conference, providing further cohesion and interaction. Fourthly, all four meetings are solely and exclusively run by the scientists and for the scientists in the field and do not involve large conference organizations. In summary, the GTN meetings offer a detailed and personalized experience for those specifically interested in the T-cell development field. Finally, strong efforts are made to ensure diversity of the meetings and to support participation of post-docs and students by providing various subsidies. We feel that mentoring young scientists ensures critical rejuvenation of the field. Consistent with this, the KTCC 2009 held 1–4 June this year,

Table 1. The four meetings of the Global Thymus Network.

Meeting	Region	Founded	Most recent	Upcoming	Website
KTCC	Japan	1991	2005	2009	http://ktcc.umin.jp
ThymOz	Australia	1995	2006	2010	http://www.thymoz.com
Rolduc	Europe	1989	2007	2011	http://www.rolduc-thymus.org
ThymUS	Caribbean/US	2001	2008	2012	http://www.thymus-conference.org

Note: authors of this article are listed in the order in which the respective conferences are being held from now on. Please address correspondence to any one of them (via the addresses on the above websites) regarding individual conferences or this article.

marks the fifth anniversary of the GTN and has a travel bursary to encourage post-doc and student attendance. The conference promises exciting science and lively discussion with topics including: thymus microenvironments, lymphoid progenitors and lineage commitment,

selection and differentiation, recognition and activation, immune response and memory, immune regulation and diseases.

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