

The latest news

INSIDE

Meet the new SMPA board!

Member of the month:
Dominic Schmid

Congress diary:
All about the SMPA
congress in Rigi-Kaltbad

Upcoming SMPA events

Publications and
communications from our
members



The first issue of our SMPA newsletter

–By Lauriane Blukacz

It is with great pleasure and excitement that we present you the first issue of our SMPA newsletter.

With this newsletter, we hope to connect current, past and future MD-PhD students from all over Switzerland. Every three months, you will find this newsletter in your mailboxes, and on our website.

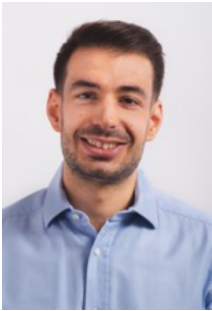
You will find information about upcoming SMPA events, both national and local. For each newsletter, we will also meet a member of the association, who will tell us about their journey. This month we will meet Dominic Schmid, MD-PhD student in Basel and winner of the best presentation prize at the 10th Annual SMPA congress. Look out for these exciting articles in future issues: we will continue to meet students and physician-scientists further along their careers to learn from their experiences.

This newsletter will also highlight the latest publications of SMPA members and will offer them a space to express themselves. We look forward to receiving your contributions!

Finally, we look forward to hearing your opinion on this first issue of our newsletter, and to receiving any ideas or suggestions. Let us know what you think!

Wishing you a good reading.

Meet the new SMPA board!



Tanay Kaymak, President

My name is Tanay Kaymak. I am in the fourth year of my MD-PhD at the Department of Biomedicine Basel. My research focuses on chronic inflammatory diseases in the gastrointestinal tract, specifically on eosinophilic esophagitis, a food allergen-triggered chronic inflammatory disease of the esophagus. I became a member of the Swiss MD-PhD Association (SMPA) in 2018 during the first year of my PhD with the motivation to connect with like-minded people. In 2019, I joined the board of the SMPA as “2nd secretary”. For the last two years, I was the acting “vice president” and recently, I had the honor to being elected as “president” of the SMPA. I am looking forward to the tasks and challenges that come with the new position and will proudly fill the position.



Isabel Arenas Hoyos, Co-Vice President

My name is Isabel Arenas Hoyos. I am originally from Colombia and now living in Bern. I am in the 4th year of my MD-PhD at the Department for BioMedical Research at the University of Bern and the Department for Hand and Plastic Surgery from the Inselspital. Currently, my research focuses on transplantation immunology in the field of ischemia-reperfusion injury and vascularized composite allotransplantation.

Having started my MD-PhD in 2019, I joined the SMPA shortly after that. It is with great pleasure that I have recently served as “2nd Secretary” and currently am acting “Co-vice-president”. We MD-PhDs are few in Switzerland and there are many of unknowns on our path. The SMPA is one of the best communities to connect and share experiences and thoughts with peers, no matter ones origin.



Irma Telarovic, Co-Vice President

My name is Irma Telarovic and I am Co-Vice President of the SMPA. I obtained my medical degree at the University of Zagreb, Croatia, followed by a master's degree in Biomedical Engineering at ETH Zurich. I am in the fourth year of my MD-PhD at the Department of Radiation Oncology of the University Hospital Zurich. As part of the Applied Radiobiology lab, I focus on optimising radiotherapy-immunotherapy combinations.

I joined the SMPA in 2021 as the 1st Secretary, with the aim to connect with like-minded colleagues and to actively promote the physician-scientist career path. I am happy to continue working with our motivated and ambitious team and look forward to our future endeavours.



Maurizio Cortada, Treasurer

My Name is Maurizio Cortada and I function as treasurer on the SMPA board since 2021. I studied medicine in Basel and Berlin and completed my Swiss state examination in 2019. Thereafter, I enrolled in the MD-PhD Program of the University of Basel working in the field of Inner Ear Biology in the laboratory of Prof. Daniel Bodmer. I completed my MD thesis in 2020. After finishing my MD-PhD studies, I will start a residency in otorhinolaryngology at the University Hospital of Basel. It is a great pleasure for me to shape the future of the SMPA actively and to foster the MD-PhD curricula in Switzerland as a board member. I'm looking forward to collaborating with active SMPA members and to meeting you.



Dimitrios Daskalou, International Liaison

My name is Dimitrios Daskalou. I joined the SMPA executive board after our General Assembly this year as International Liaison. I received my medical degree from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, in 2018, where I also attended a master's program in Medical Research Methodology. I am currently an ENT resident at Geneva University Hospitals with a primary focus on otology. I will start my MD-PhD in November in the Inner Ear and Olfaction Lab at Geneva University, under the supervision of Prof. Pascal Senn. My primary focus of research is the protection of inner ear function. More precisely, I will study the potential of NADPH oxidase 3 inhibition to prevent radiosurgery-induced hearing loss in vestibular schwannoma.

Word of the SMPA president

–By Tanay Kaymak

Dear SMPA members,

On behalf of the SMPA, a national association representing clinicians and scientists interested in medical research, I am pleased to introduce our organization and our vision for it.

Combining clinical work and research is essential to promote progress in medicine. However, combining the two can be challenging at times. Besides shaping the scientific mind, an MD–PhD helps to develop the organizational and managing skills required to handle clinics and science coincidentally. Although Switzerland has well-structured MD–PhD programs, students, clinicians and scientists often find it challenging to get access to information and exchange with colleagues about the benefits, drawbacks, and challenges of an MD–PhD.

We, the SMPA, aim to promote communication between present, future, and past MD–PhD candidates and to form a network for exchange on a scientific and personal level. We encourage international interaction in collaboration with the European MD–PhD Association (EMPA) and other national MD–PhD associations. Our local meetings in all major cities of Switzerland with an MD–PhD program (Basel, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Zürich) and our annual SMPA congress provide a perfect platform for MD–PhDs to meet and connect.

In addition, as SMPA, we aim to promote physicians' scientific education and strengthen MD–PhD curricula by fostering discussion with decision-makers and advocating the interests of the MD–PhD community.

Finally, the SMPA is a contact point offering help and information about the topic "MD–PhD" throughout the entire career. If you have questions or face any issues, we are pleased to provide advice and support.

I invite all students, clinicians, and scientists interested in medical sciences to join us!

Yours sincerely,

Tanay Kaymak, President of the SMPA



Call for new active members

Whether you have a good idea for a local meeting in your city or you want to become part of the SMPA board, we invite everyone who is motivated to participate more actively in the SMPA to reach out to us. Currently, we have **two open board positions**. A board position requires participation at the board meetings, taking place every 1–2 months, and includes participation in the organization of local meetings and the annual congress, as well as administrative tasks and the online and social media appearance of the SMPA. **If you are interested**, you can contact us by email at "info@swiss-mdphd.com". We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Meet Dominic Schmid, our member of the month

–By Lauriane Blukacz

Dominic Schmid is an MD–PhD student in Basel. He attended the 10th Annual SMPA congress, where he won the best presentation prize. We decided to meet Dominic and learn more about him.



–Where do you come from and where did you study?

I grew up in Switzerland, in the Canton of Valais. I studied medicine in Zurich and took advantage of the practical year to travel while getting some clinical education. I went to Morocco, the UK (Oxford) and Canada (Montreal). Going to Morocco was really interesting as I could experience a different health system and see how they were managing limited resources. The destination I liked the most however was Montreal, where I was working at the Children’s Hospital.

After med school, I decided to move to Heidelberg (Germany) to do research at the DKFZ (Deutsches Krebsforschungszentrum). There I applied for the MD–PhD program, did some lab rotations and started to work in a lab investigating biomarkers for glioblastoma. Due to administrative difficulties (to get into the MD–PhD program, you already need to have your MD title, which I didn’t have) but also because the research I was doing was quite far away from my primary interest –cancer immunotherapy–, I decided to come back to Switzerland after one year and used my work from Heidelberg for my MD thesis. After this experience, I looked for a lab in Switzerland that would fit my interest, and I applied in Prof. Zippelius’ lab in Basel, where I am now an MD–PhD student since Fall 2019.

–Tell me about your research

So, I am working in the field of cancer immunotherapy, and especially on how T cells adapt to cancer. The T cells that fight cancer cells undergo a different differentiation program than they would in the context of an infection. Modulating this differentiation program as a therapeutic option for cancer can lead to promising results. Using T cells from healthy human donors, we developed a method to direct these cells into the “cancer differentiation program”. We can then use these cells to better understand their biology.

–What motivated you to do an MD–PhD curriculum?

Since childhood, I have always liked the idea of doing research and after high school, I considered studying Natural Sciences. I finally chose to study medicine, but did not forget about my desire to do research: it was clear to me that I would do my master thesis in a lab. What I really like about research is that it trains your thinking, requires determination and pushes you to try hard to achieve something.

–What are your plans after your MD–PhD studies?

I will start my clinical training in Internal Medicine in Olten, starting in 1,5 years. Then I plan to specialize in Oncology, as I both like the research and clinical sides of that field. I would like to do a post–doc at some point, potentially abroad, and if possible combined with some clinical activity. However, this can be difficult depending on the destination...

-Do you have any advice for younger students?

The biggest advice I would give is to not panic about the time and commitment an MD-PhD involves. In the beginning, one has the tendency to want to finish as soon as possible, but this went away with time for me, and I am convinced that the MD-PhD studies are no wasted time. My second advice would be to find a balance between trying out things (and with this, gaining independence) but also knowing when to ask for and get the help you need. Finding somebody that has your back is important, so that you can make the most of your time.

- You just mentioned as advice not to rush with time during the MD-PhD studies, but I heard from many students that time is of great concern, especially due to age limits of some grants. Is that something you think about?

smiles I am maybe a bit naïve with that, but I believe that everything will fall into place. I somehow can't change the course of things now and I am really convinced that not doing something you enjoy just because of time will impede your scientific output. I am quite open when it comes to the place where I live and work, so I think this is an advantage here. I would be happy to live in Switzerland, but I can consider living abroad as well.

-An important concern nowadays is how to balance life and work. How do you manage that?

This is definitely work in progress and I learned it better during the PhD than during medical school. It is true that you can lose yourself in work and it is for me an active job to not think about work while I am taking free time. But I think it is really important to take some time off your project, as we are at a moment in our life where we need to construct and explore our interests, find out what we like to do apart from work.

-So can you tell us more about your hobbies?

I enjoy doing sports, especially biking, which I started during the lockdown. I also started rowing. Apart from that, I also started learning Latin. **laughs** I know this doesn't sound relaxing, but I enjoy the structure and rules that this language has. Otherwise, I enjoy traveling.

-You just mentioned the lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. How did it affect your research?

The biggest consequence this pandemic had on my research was due to the disruption of the supply chain. I had to wait for months for some reagents. But we could still come to the lab most of the time. Another consequence was the reduction in informal communication between co-workers that would typically happen at the workplace. Usually, these conversations are very valuable for finding solutions to small problems you face in your research.

-Thank you very much Dominic for being our first member of the month and for this very interesting conversation. We wish you all the best in your MD-PhD studies!

Want to discuss more with Dominic? Get to know Dominic in person at local events in Basel!



Congress diary: story of the 10th Annual SMPA congress in Rigi-Kaltbad

–By Lucie Bourguignon

This year's 10th SMPA congress was the first in-person edition since 2019 and my first time attending this event. Bachelor medical students, current MD-PhD students, professors and responsables of the Swiss MD-PhD programs: in total, fifty of us met last June in Rigi, Lucerne (the views from the mountain hotel were amazing!). This year's edition focused on regenerative medicine. We heard presentations about regeneration of various organs (kidney and cartilage transplants, inner ear, peripheral nervous system), and techniques using mesenchymal stem cells. We were also given the opportunity to present our research which included a diversity of additional topics such as subretinal fibrosis, glioblastoma, cancer immunotherapy, and multiple sclerosis, among others.

One highlight of the weekend was the insightful presentation workshop led by Prof. Anja Janoschka. We discussed the example of one of the presentations of the weekend (thank you Maria!) and received feedback on how to better present our research to capture an audience's attention. Since my talk was 30 minutes after this workshop, I have to admit that I ended up making some last minute modifications! I am very grateful that I could discuss my work with fellow MD-PhD students. What really distinguished this event from other conferences that I have attended before is the diversity of research backgrounds and genuine curiosity of the audience. This made the following discussions highly engaging. Another instance of this dynamic occurred with the podium session, where we were given the opportunity to directly and openly interact with the heads of the MD-PhD programs throughout Switzerland.

As you may have already guessed, I had a great time during the congress and thoroughly enjoyed our fruitful conversations: everything was well organized to promote interactions. I am already looking forward to joining again next year and meeting some of you at the local meetings in the meantime.

Lucie Bourguignon, 3rd year MD-PhD student in Biomedical Data Sciences

Upcoming events

International events

After two years of virtual events, the European MD-PhD Association (EMPA) organizes its first in-person gathering since the COVID-19 pandemic. We are happy to invite you to **EMPA's Annual Conference and General Assembly, which will take place in Milan on October 14th, 2022**. It will be a joint conference with the Virgilio Program, including fantastic scientific talks, a workshop, and our 2022–2023 Executive Board election.

Save the date! It's a great occasion to meet your peers and network. You can follow EMPA on social media or visit EMPA's [website](#) for more detailed information to plan your trip.



SAVE THE DATE

14
Oct.
22

"Meeting in Research"

Joint Conference
Virgilio Program -
European MD-PhD Association

09:00 | 18:00

University of Milano-Bicocca – Aula Magna, Edificio Agora ex-U6
Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo, 1, Milano

Local events

Basel

"Rhyschwümme" (04.08):

Swimming down the Rhine followed by beer at one of the buvettes. People who do not want to swim, can also join only for the beer afterwards.

"Herbschtmäss" (29.10–13.11):

Enjoying the treats of the "Basler Herbschtmäss" together.

Exact date to be announced.

Zurich

"Let's meet" (19.10, 18:30): Irchel Bar

let's get to know each other around a drink (get a free drink in exchange for a follow on Twitter or LinkedIn!).

Register at <https://www.swiss-mdphd.com/event-details/smpa-local-meeting-zurich>

Geneva

"Let's meet" (Sep/Oct 2022)
Information will follow

Bern

"Let's meet" (01.09, 18:00): Summer Bar

"Malso Pop Up"

Register at <https://www.swiss-mdphd.com/event-details/smpa-local-meeting-bern>

Local SMPA contacts

Basel

Maurizio Cortada maurizio.cortada@unibas.ch
Tanay Kaymak tanay.kaymak@unibas.ch

Bern

Isabel Arenas Hoyos isabel.arenas@dbmr.unibe.ch

Geneva (and Romandie)

Dimitrios Daskalou dimitrios.daskalou@hcuge.ch

Zurich

Lucie Bourguignon lucie.bourguignon@hest.ethz.ch
Irma Telarovic irma.telarovic@uzh.ch

Latest member publications

Send us your latest publications (2022) for the next issue of the newsletter!
info@swiss-mdphd.com

–Telarovic I, Yong CSM, Guckenberger M, Unkelbach J, Pruschy M. Radiation-induced lymphopenia does not impact treatment efficacy in a mouse tumor model. *Neoplasia*. 2022 Sep;31:100812. doi: 10.1016/j.neo.2022.100812. Epub 2022 Jun 3. PMID: 35667149; PMCID: PMC9168138.

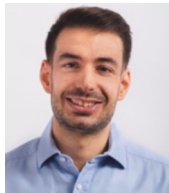
– Kaymak T, Kaya B, Wuggenig P, Nuciforo S, Göldi A; Swiss EoE Cohort Study Group (SEECs), Oswald F, Roux J, Noti M, Melhem H, Hruz P, Niess JH. IL-20 subfamily cytokines impair the oesophageal epithelial barrier by diminishing filaggrin in eosinophilic oesophagitis. *Gut*. 2022 May 25;gutjnl-2022-327166. doi: 10.1136/gutjnl-2022-327166. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 35613844.

– Wiedemann SJ, Trimigliozzi K, Dror E, Meier DT, Molina-Tijeras JA, Rachid L, Le Foll C, Magnan C, Schulze F, Stawiski M, Häuselmann SP, Méreau H, Böni-Schnetzler M, Donath MY. The cephalic phase of insulin release is modulated by IL-1 β . *Cell Metab*. 2022 Jul 5;34(7):991-1003.e6. doi: 10.1016/j.cmet.2022.06.001. Epub 2022 Jun 23. PMID: 35750050.

Contributors to this issue



Lauriane Blukacz is a french MD-PhD student, located in Basel. She is finishing her third PhD year and studies drug responses in patient-derived hepatocellular carcinoma organoid models. At the last SMPA general assembly, she volunteered to create the SMPA newsletter and so newly joined the SMPA team.



Tanay Kaymak is a fourth-year MD-PhD student in Basel and the newly elected SMPA President. His research focuses on chronic inflammatory diseases in the gastrointestinal tract, specifically on eosinophilic esophagitis, a food allergen-triggered chronic inflammatory disease of the esophagus.



Lucie Bourguignon is an MD-PhD student, currently in her third year of PhD. Before the PhD, she studied Computational Biology and Bioinformatics in Zurich for her master's degree. She now works in the field biomedical data sciences applied to spinal cord injury.

Should you like to contribute to a next issue of our newsletter, please submit your text or idea to info@swiss-mdphd.com with "Newsletter contribution" as the email subject.

Follow us!

- ▶ Website
- ▶ LinkedIn
- ▶ Twitter

For any question, suggestion, or feedback,
please write to **info@swiss-mdphd.com** .
We would love to hear from you!

