

## **2012 SGP Travelling Scholar Award Program Report**

*Faculty Host: Aldebaran M. Hofer, PhD – Harvard Medical School and VA Boston Healthcare System (VABHS), Boston MA*

### **1. The focus of the visit (i.e., reasons for inviting the selected speaker) and specific benefits of the program to the department.**

The Society of General Physiologists generously sponsored a two-day visit and Special Lecture by Prof. Mark T. Nelson, Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of Pharmacology at the University of Vermont. Dr. Nelson is a world-renowned expert in smooth muscle physiology and calcium signaling. His outstanding work on ion channel control of local cerebral blood flow, peripheral resistance, and urinary bladder function represented a perfect match with the research and clinical interests of groups working in our Research Service at the West Roxbury Campus of the VA Hospital. Dr. Nelson's incredible breadth of knowledge in physiology, his stellar technical expertise, and warm, approachable nature ensured lively discussions and the ready exchange of information throughout his visit. We are extremely grateful to him for kindly sharing his time and knowledge, and to the SGP for making his visit possible.

### **2. The audience.**

About 50 people attended the formal seminar, held on Thursday November 29, 2012 in the Bignami Conference Room of the West Roxbury VA Hospital. The audience was composed of senior and junior faculty members, post-docs and students from different affiliations: West Roxbury, Brockton and Jamaica Plain campuses of the VA Boston Healthcare System, Harvard Medical School and Boston University. The seminar also drew a number of clinicians and researchers from different facilities such as Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital.

SGP member and faculty host, Aldebaran M. Hofer, provided a brief introduction of the speaker. She also took the opportunity to explain the Traveling Scholar Program and to point out the benefits of SGP membership to audience members. Dr. Nelson then delivered a spectacular one-hour lecture. The audience was very engaged throughout and enthusiastic discussion followed long after the lecture finished. Refreshments were served before and during the lecture.

### **3. The title of the formal seminar.**

"Elementary  $\text{Ca}^{2+}$  signals through endothelial TRPV4 channels regulate vascular function."

### **4. Meetings with junior and senior investigators.**

Dr. Nelson's meetings with investigators were distributed over 2 days. Upon arrival, our Traveling Scholar met with Dr. Hofer's lab, including postdoctoral fellows, junior and senior investigators. Later on Dr. Nelson had lunch with students and post-docs from the laboratories of Drs. Raj K. Goyal and Maryrose Sullivan. This was followed by formal

presentations delivered by junior members of Dr. Goyal's and Sullivan's research groups on the theme of bladder and gastrointestinal smooth muscle physiology. The last individual meeting of the day prior the seminar event was with junior faculty member and clinical staff, Dr. Natasha Y. Frank.

After his excellent seminar, Dr. Nelson was taken to dinner at the Island Creek Oyster Bar in Boston. Lively discussions (scientific and otherwise) ensued with those in attendance, including post-docs, junior, and senior faculty members.

On Friday (November 30) Dr. Nelson kindly returned to our institute for a series of individual meetings with junior faculty, including Dr. Hemant S. Thatte, Dr. Rao Prabhala & members of Dr. Nikhil Munshi's lab, followed by another meeting with young investigators from the Charness laboratory. The visit of Dr. Nelson ended with a lunch with Dr. Gary E. Gilbert's lab.

### **SUMMARY**

The visit of Dr. Nelson was a huge success. His formal seminar attracted the interest of faculty professors, postdoctoral fellows and students belonging to different academic institutions (Harvard Medical School, Boston University) and medical facilities (VA Boston Healthcare System's West Roxbury, Brockton and Jamaica Plain campuses, Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital). A large number of junior and senior faculty members, as well students and postdoctoral fellows had the opportunity to directly interact and discuss their research with Dr. Nelson in individual meetings. Feedback from everyone about the Traveling Scholar Program was overwhelmingly positive. We would again like to express our gratitude to both Professor Nelson and the SGP for this enriching educational opportunity.