

IMG offers an ideal environment for PhD studies. I always know there's someone I can turn to, says Karolína Vaníčková from the Laboratory of Haematooncology

By the end of her second year, she had already published her first author paper. She has presented her research at international conferences in Europe and the USA. Karolína Vaníčková, M.Sc., a PhD student from the IMG, is fascinated by hematopoietic stem cells and is an enthusiastic science communicator.

How and when did you decide for IMG?

I joined IMG during my master's studies, thanks to a recommendation at the faculty. After my bachelor's studies at the Faculty of Science, Charles University, I was looking for a lab to work on my master's thesis and the lab of my current supervisor, Meritxell Alberich Jordà, was highly recommended to me. Although I wasn't much interested in hematology at that time, it was Meri's enthusiasm and the overall friendly atmosphere in the lab, along with the excellent scientific facilities at IMG, that convinced me.

Do you enjoy hematology now? What exactly are you focusing on?

Yes, it didn't take long for me to grow fond of hematology. I'm fascinated by hematopoietic stem cells and their ability to produce mature blood cells throughout our lives. This was one of the reasons why, after completing my master's, I decided to continue with a PhD in the same lab. My projects focus on elucidating mechanisms through which hematopoietic stem cells respond to the increased need for granulocytes during infection.

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Now in your 3rd year of PhD, how do you evaluate your decision to pursue a PhD at IMG?

Looking back, I see it positively. Starting to work on my project during my master's significantly eased my transition into the PhD. I had already gone through the initial phase of learning methods and literature review, allowing me to dive fully into the project. Thanks to this, I managed to publish my first author article by the end of my second year and had the opportunity to present my data at international hematology conferences in both Europe and the USA.

What do you see as the main advantages of pursuing PhD at IMG?

I think IMG is an ideal environment for pursuing PhD, thanks to its scientific facilities and the PhD community. I always know there's someone I can turn to in case of any problems, and there are plenty of events organized specifically for students, where one can relax and share their PhD experiences with peers going through the same challenges. Initially, I was worried about missing out on international experience, but our lab's diversity has effectively compensated for this. Additionally, an internship abroad, which is a mandatory part of my PhD program, still awaits me

What's it like to be in such an international lab?

When I started my master's, I was a bit scared, if I would be able to discuss scientific work with my

supervisor in English. In the end, I must say I'm very grateful for it. You quickly become more fluent, and any further communication in English becomes effortless. It boosts your confidence a lot, especially for scientific presentations. Currently, I'm the only Czech in the lab, and sometimes I come home feeling like I can't even express myself in Czech anymore, so it definitely has its pros and cons.

Is it a good preparation for a scientific career abroad?

Yes, you really get to experience what it's like to work in an international team with people from various cultures. It's a perfect chance to have an international experience while still being home in the Czech Republic. This also provides me with the opportunity to handle many tasks simply because others don't speak the language, ranging from the less pleasant aspects like various administrative tasks to the more enjoyable ones, such as science popularization.

Do you enjoy popularization of science? What kind of activities have you had the chance to be involved in?

Yes, over time, science communication has become a favorite part of my work – I enjoy trying to bring our research closer to people with various levels of knowledge. So far, I've had the opportunity to prepare a lecture about blood and immune cells along with a small practical demonstration for kindergarten kids and also a lecture for high school students for an Open House of IMG.

What other activities have you been involved in?

We tried to bring our research closer to the general public through press releases and an article in the popular science magazine [Vesmír](#) (in Czech). In addition to that, I had a lecture at a conference for clinical hematologists, two years in a row, trying to explain what basic research using mouse models looks like. Despite the conference's clinical orientation, I was very happy to receive the Young Hematologists Award for my contributions to the field.

At the university, I've helped teach a course called Advances in Immunology to students doing their master's and PhDs. And last year, I was involved in the organization of a conference for Immunology PhD students.

Are you able to have any free time with all these activities?

Even though I enjoy my work, having enough free time for other activities is crucial for me. Lately, I've been quite successful at maintaining a work-life balance. During my first year of the PhD, I learned to plan my work well and work as efficiently as possible. Additionally, I don't mind getting up a bit earlier, as I find it easier to focus in the morning, and it's quieter since most of my colleagues are not exactly morning people. This way, I usually avoid long evenings at work, which inevitably end up in something going wrong. Of course, it doesn't always work out, for example, during article revisions, I couldn't avoid long evening measurements and weekends at work.

What awaits you in your PhD, and what are your plans afterward?

Two weeks ago, I passed my doctoral exams, fulfilling one of the last requirements to finish my studies. Now, I'm trying to fully immerse myself back into lab work and would like to complete my second project. This fall, I also plan to go on an internship and then it's "just" writing the doctoral thesis and defense. As for plans after my PhD, I'd like to go on a postdoctoral fellowship abroad, but I don't have any concrete plans yet, maybe just a preference for somewhere warm.

Thank you for the interview and best of luck!

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