

Erasmus+ best practice project: ADVANCE

Training the future generation of cell and gene therapy researchers in Europe

Project ADVANCE was recently completed and received an excellent rating. The score is especially high on impact. We are happy to highlight them as a best practice.

Cell and gene therapies are innovative advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs). These therapies hold great promise for the future treatment and even cure of some diseases such as certain cancers, as well as haematological, neurodegenerative and genetic diseases. ATMPs also offer enormous potential for diseases that are currently incurable.

Unfortunately, there are still some obstacles to this. For example, the "translation" of scientific findings into patient benefits has many challenges. It also requires the involvement of many different parties to make cell and gene therapies available to patients in the clinic. The Erasmus+ funded ADVANCE project is helping with this. To ensure that the therapies live up to their potential, specific skills and knowledge are needed. ADVANCE supported early-career scientists to develop skills and scientific knowledge in the field of cell and gene therapies.

What is ADVANCE?

Eliis Keidong of EATRIS says: "The project started in 2019 with six European partners in Italy, Slovenia, Belgium and the Netherlands. Working closely together, they created a wealth of training materials and opportunities for all researchers across Europe, and beyond.

This will allow them to learn more about the challenges, but above all the opportunities that exist in this rapidly developing and important field. We are ambitious and want to support early-career scientists to improve their career opportunities and employability in this complex field.'

What does ADVANCE do?

The ADVANCE program consists of three components, which complement each other: an open and free online learning module, a comprehensive webinar series and an intensive face-to-face workshop. Says Eliis, "The entire curriculum was based on exploring the four main challenges in ATMP development: scientific, manufacturing, reimbursement and regulatory. We also complemented technical knowledge with career advice and support in the form of webinars and individual career coaching sessions." With sustainability in mind, the online course and webinar series were fully open and free to all. They also remain available through the [EATRIS TransMed Academy Online Learning Portal](#). A five-day workshop also took place twice during the project. Eliis: "This brought together about 30 students each year to meet, network, brainstorm and exchange experiences."

What makes ADVANCE successful?

Thanks to the presence of top scientists and experts as speakers, the ADVANCE program was a great success. It received extremely positive feedback from both students and speakers. In fact, the workshops were so popular that they continue to take place every summer in Slovenia, led by the University of Ljubljana. The first edition is already from June 5 to 9, 2023. "In line with the high quality of the material, it was a pleasure and an honour for us to cooperate with the European Medicines Agency," Eliis said.

"They provided all the learning materials for the online Regulatory Education unit of the course and organised with us the three highly popular webinars with more than 800 participants. They remain committed to providing regulatory education for ATMP researchers." At the project organisation, they are delighted that Erasmus+ chose the project as best practice. "However, we already had the feeling," Eliis says. "We saw it in many aspects, from the high interest of participants to the willingness of top scientists as speakers and partners. We also hear from participants that they find new jobs and collaboration opportunities in the field of cell and gene therapies after participating in the ADVANCE program. We are confident that the project's many hundreds of participants are well-positioned to continue the important work and bring about future change in their research communities."

Want to know more?

Interested? Follow [ADVANCE ATMP Training Program on LinkedIn](#) and join the LinkedIn group [Next Generation of Translational Researchers](#) and never miss an upcoming event or opportunity.

ADVANCE and EATRIS

The project was coordinated by [EATRIS](#), the European infrastructure for translational medicine and included the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), KU Leuven (Belgium), Elevate Health (Netherlands), Takis Biotech (Italy), Istituto Superiore di Sanita (Italy) and Universite Libre De Bruxelles (Belgium) as partners.