

BEYOND THE LAB: A REWARDING EXPERIENCE IN MELBOURNE

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As a PhD candidate (Pharmacology) at the Faculty of Pharmacy, UiTM, supervised by Prof. Dr. Mizaton Hazizul Hasan, I had the honour of presenting my research at the ASCEPT, APFP and APSA Joint Congress held in Melbourne, Australia, earlier this month. This opportunity marked a wonderful and impactful milestone in my academic journey.

It all began the moment my research abstracts had been accepted for poster presentations. The abstracts focused on exploring the mechanism of the immunomodulatory potential of ant nest tuber (*Myrmecodia platytyrea*) to mitigate inflammation. To ensure effective research communication blended with a dash of creativity, I utilised Canva to make stylish posters. As I prepared my presentation, I pondered upon the years of dedication and challenges that had taken me to this point. Later, I learnt that I was one of the recipients of travel grants awarded by the Asia Pacific Federation of Pharmacologists.

Presenting my posters at the congress to prominent international researchers was thrilling. The insightful questions and constructive feedback I received were invaluable to polishing my research. I also engaged in a fruitful discussion with several experts who shared my interests in traditional medicine and natural product research. I attended keynote lectures and symposia by leading scientists whose groundbreaking research broadened my understanding of various topics in pharmacology (e.g., drug discovery and modern Chinese medicine) and sparked new ideas for my work in the future.

A particularly memorable experience was co-chairing an oral presentation session for the traditional medicines and pharmaceutical sciences theme alongside Dr. Thilini Thrimawithana, a senior lecturer from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University, Australia. This was a rewarding experience that helped me refine my interpersonal and organisational skills. At the same time, I was struck by the dynamic research culture in Melbourne and the emphasis on fostering global connections. This reflects the importance of diversity and inclusion—not just in their society, but also in research collaboration.

Finally, attending this congress has been a transforming personal and academic experience, leaving me with unforgettable memories. It reminded me of the need to push ourselves beyond our comfort zones to grow as researchers and to seize any opportunity that comes our way. I also want to thank all my colleagues and friends who helped me with my research, both directly and indirectly. To all aspiring academics, I implore you to embrace every chance to share your work with the world—you'll never know where it might take you!