

Sandra Glotzer

Soto/Sonnenschein Laboratory, Tufts University School of Medicine

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Nicole and I nervously arrived at 150 Harrison Avenue on Monday morning, hoping to make a favorable impression on the distinguished Ana and Carlos. After what felt like hours of waiting, we were met by the effusive Cheryl, who immediately threw at us a wealth of alarming information about endocrine disrupting chemicals and how they are linked to various diseases. With this captivating introduction to our 3-week journey, Nicole and I knew that we were going to gain a great deal of knowledge, which would stick with us forever.

Throughout the first week, each of the lab members gave us mini lectures on their areas of expertise. We learned how to process, embed, section, and stain tissue, as well as how to perform 2D imaging of epithelial cells and 3D imaging of epithelial structures. We were taught about mammary gland development, U-shaped dose response curves, BPA, and cancer theories. We read research papers about stromal-epithelial interactions, 3D cultures, classification of cancers, and chemicals added to food. We were given lists of books and websites for more information about endocrine disruptors. We were told the story of how Ana and Carlos got into this research in the first place (their experiment got messed up because the plastic tubes contained endocrine disrupting chemicals).

The second half of our time at the lab was spent collecting our own data. We analyzed the effect of endocrine disrupting chemicals on the growth and maturation of mammary glands by looking at various characteristics, such as the number of terminal end buds and the areas of different structures. The lab members taught us how to insert our results into data tables, how to make graphs, and how to present this information in a poster.

Although the scientific knowledge I gained was certainly useful, one of the most valuable aspects of working in the lab was learning what it means to be a scientist. The Soto/Sonnenschein team was a vibrant group of people, who worked well together and actually enjoyed spending time with each other. They ate lunch together every day and even watched the World Cup together. They were supportive of each other; one evening we all went as a group to attend Ana and Carlos' lecture at a public library. Through the lab team, I learned that in order to do good research, one of the most important things is to like whom you work with.

My time spent at the Soto/Sonnenschein laboratory was undoubtedly a beneficial and enjoyable experience. Not only did I expand my scientific realm, but also I now have a great deal of information that will help me make better-informed consumer choices. I am eager to share this information with the public in order to help others live more safely. I will always be grateful to the GNBCC and the Soto/Sonnenschein team for giving me this opportunity.