

Novartis International BioCamp 2014 Winners Travel to China ^[1]

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Surrounded by hundreds of medicinal herbs, three graduate students pondered the connections and contradictions between Eastern and Western medicine, and the benefits of both tradition and innovation.

The students - Sarah Elnaiem, Eli Goldberg, and Janko Ignjatovi?, winners of the Novartis 2014 International Biotechnology Leadership Camp (BioCamp) – discovered the medicinal herbs in the Shanghai Museum of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The museum visit was part of a reward trip to China, the students' prize for winning the BioCamp student competition.



From left to right: Eli Goldberg (USA), Sarah Elnaiem (UK) and Janko Ignjatovic (Serbia)

Launched in 2003, Novartis BioCamp has developed into an international forum for science and business students from around the world to learn, exchange ideas and work together in a highly competitive business environment. In 2014, we welcomed more than 60 selected students from leading international universities in 25 countries and territories to the Novartis Campus in Basel, Switzerland. For 3 days, the students had the opportunity to interact with Novartis scientists and executives, visit laboratories and meet with researchers, take part in workshops and discussion groups, and compete in a challenge to develop a business concept for a hypothetical new drug compound.

Eli, Sarah and Janko were chosen as the winners based on their performance, contribution, leadership and teamwork.

A Commitment to China

Under the theme “The perfect combination of tradition and innovation”, the first stop on the trip was the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR) in Shanghai, part of Novartis global drug discovery network. Novartis made the decision to bring a research facility to China in 2006, spearheading the establishment of the first true drug discovery center in Shanghai among all other international healthcare companies. Now in its ninth year, the well-established site continues to address unmet medical needs in China and Asia with its research focused on diseases that are endemic to the region, such as certain cancers and liver diseases.



The winners pose in the hall of Shanghai Museum of Traditional Chinese Medicine. (From left to right: Eli, Sarah, and Janko)

“Novartis is dedicated to this in such a big way,” says Eli Goldberg, the Zurich-based American entrepreneur who has started a medical device tracking company. “This is not just a production facility; there is real science and big science being done here. And that is

something that I think shocks us all.”

The Shanghai R&D center includes many Chinese scientists who have returned from abroad after graduating from top-tier universities and institutes. “I was very happy to hear they had international education and decided to come back to China. Because I believe the best place to develop talent is in one’s own country,” remarks Janko, who is about to join the Sandoz site in Mengeš, Slovenia this fall after finishing doctoral studies in Ljubljana.

Expecting the New Campus

The new state-of-the-art drug discovery campus currently being built in Shanghai is not to be missed by any visitor to Novartis. Although it’s still under construction, the three students still got a flavor of what is soon to be one of Novartis’ top three research centers, along with Cambridge, Massachusetts in the US and Basel, Switzerland.

“The center is what impressed me most,” Sarah remarked.” There is a garden, the outdoor space, and the landscape. A few days ago, we went to Yu Garden and it was just such a relaxing experience for us. I think the idea of even something like that in a workplace, an area with beautiful trees—that seems quite nice really. It is an escape. Having seen the facility in Basel and just meeting people who work there, you can sort of tell they are a lot happier, and they are comfortable where they are working, satisfied.”

Janko: “What I really like about Novartis and its whole campus concept is that it combines work and life very nicely. From my perspective, I would like to see the inner sides of all buildings, especially the laboratory, to find out how it is organized. And it would be nice to have informal meetings and relax in the atmosphere Novartis provides.”

More Than Sightseeing

When the three first-time visitors got a chance to do some sightseeing, the last piece of the Shanghai puzzle fell into place. Eli had never thought hypermodernity and tradition could be “so well juxtaposed” until he came to this “city out of time,” where he found himself at the picturesque Yu Garden from the Ming dynasty hundreds of years ago seeing ultramodern skyscrapers like the Shanghai Tower in the background. “It seems... anachronistic,” he said, seeming to have run out of words.



A scientist introduces research facilities in NIBR Shanghai.

This is exactly the kind of contrast Janko thought exemplified Shanghai as a place without limits where anything is possible. “It feels like an experience that will change us and even kind of provoke our way of thinking and therefore it is very special.”

For Sarah, it was “an overwhelming experience” for her with a lot of things and people to remember, which reminded her that there is a sense of purpose in this fast-paced, expanding city. “We have all got a different perspective on China now I think.”

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