

Conference Report: British Pharmacological Society (BPS) Pharmacology Conference 2025, Belfast

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Theme: "Today's Science, Tomorrow's Medicines"

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1. Overview and purpose of attendance

I was privileged last year to receive funding that enabled me to attend the British Pharmacological Society (BPS) annual Pharmacology conference 2025 in Belfast. The conference brought together an international audience, with over 800 delegates, and featured more than 40 scientific sessions over three days spanning plenaries, symposia, workshops, debates, prize lectures, as well as built-in networking and social events.

This was an exciting moment for me, as it was the biggest professional platform I have participated in since my arrival in the United Kingdom (UK). It was also timely, coming right after my first Oxford academic term in Pharmacology. As I was just settling in & I welcomed this opportunity beyond the classroom to strengthen my scientific understanding of contemporary pharmacology and develop practical, industry-relevant skills that support my goal of transitioning into the pharmaceutical and biotech industries after completing my academic programme.

My fundamental aims were to:

- i. Update my scientific knowledge across key translational areas (precision medicine, omics, neurodegeneration, cardiovascular pharmacology, and responsible AI in healthcare).
- ii. Learn how academic pharmacology connects to industry decision-making, including drug discovery, development pipelines, and skills valued by employers.
- iii. Build a possible professional network and establish contacts across academia and industry through receptions and early-career activities.

2. Key learning benefits

Exposure to cutting-edge themes with clear translational relevance

A major benefit of the conference for me was the rare, structured exposure to topics that map directly onto modern pharmaceutical research and development

priorities, where my true passion lies. Some of the areas that resonated most with me were the following:

A. Precision medicine and precision public health

This was the opening lecture from Prof Dame Anna. I found it fascinating, and it deepened my understanding of how genomics, population health, and therapeutics development increasingly intersect. I could piece together some transferable contexts for industry roles in translational science and medical affairs. Having learned about precision medicines based on DNA/RNA approaches during Michaelmas term, the insights shared were of great benefit to my academic curiosity.

B. Targeting the blood–brain barrier

This was a prize lecture by Dr Mootaz Salman, which offered a current view on mechanistic and model-system challenges in neurodegeneration research, highly applicable to CNS drug development and translational modelling. My career focus area within Pharmacology is Neuropharmacology, in which the blood–brain barrier poses one of the main hurdles in drug delivery. This lecture enhanced my perspective on the level of research being done by top scientists in the United Kingdom to overcome this issue. I managed to pick one aspect of his lecture which I am going to use as a basis to do a literature lecture in a journal club expected to be delivered as part of Hilary term course units. It is a great start to Hilary term while being aware of what I should work on.

C. AI innovation and ethics in healthcare and drug discovery

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as the technology of our era, carries huge potential for growth in the healthcare sector and brings revolutionary power to improving scientific research and drug development. But its ethical use is as critical as the benefits it can bring to the field. Prof Patricia's views supported a more realistic and responsible sense of where AI can add value, and what governance and ethical constraints look like in practice. This endowed me with better perspectives on how AI can be a great driver of modern research while observing ethical roots.

D. Scientific learning outcomes

The conference gave me renewed zeal and enthusiasm, alongside a more coherent “big picture” of how mechanistic pharmacology, biomarkers, digital approaches, and clinical translation fit together. This is valuable both for the remaining MSc coursework in Hilary and Trinity terms and, more importantly, for pharma-facing roles that require cross-disciplinary literacy in the long run, which is my dream career trajectory.

Additionally, I learned to make better scientific judgement by practising a more relevant academic-and-industry approach to evaluating research through critical questioning, including:

- i. What is the unmet need and how is it measured clinically?
- ii. What are the translational assumptions between model systems and human disease?
- iii. What evidence would be needed for a go/no-go decision?
- iv. How might a biomarker be validated and deployed in a trial?

I also felt a deeper sense of fulfilment from having the courage to pose my questions to the presenters and receiving feedback. This strengthened my resolve that genuine scientific learning happens through engagement and conversation.

3. Networking benefits and industry relevance

The conference design included multiple structured points where meeting people is “built in”. These were the areas where I went and participated fully, since the financial cost was already covered.

A. Welcome reception and social events

There was an excellent welcome reception organised prior to the conference’s official start. Here I met other early career researchers from leading UK universities with Pharmacology-focused research such as the University of Cambridge, Manchester, and Bristol. Most were postgraduate students, while others were employed as research assistants at their universities. Our conversations moved from introductions to deeper discussions about the field of pharmacology and future career prospects. I had the chance to learn from their experiences and reflect on how to improve on the personal gaps I identified.

On the evening of the first day, we visited the Titanic site and museum in Belfast city together as a group. This was a breathtaking moment for me. Having learned about the historic events surrounding the Titanic ship during my teenage years, I couldn’t imagine that I would one day tour this museum in person. I was deeply excited and enjoyed walking around other prominent sites in Belfast during our spare time. Thus, the experience was well-rounded and purposeful. To keep the bond alive after the conference, we shared contact details and followed each other on LinkedIn. Most importantly, I had the chance to practise professional networking behaviours by introducing myself clearly and asking targeted questions.

B. Career talks

Science and career prospects were my main pillars of focus, and the career talk session hosted by Dr Arnaud Bastien (Vice President and Global Program Lead at Bristol Myers Squibb) provided practical insight into role types, expectations, and how

scientists can position themselves for early and mid-career transitions. I did a personal introspection of where I am in the pyramid chain of my career and what I need to get right prior to my graduation to kickstart a successful transition into the industry. I have already prepared a blueprint draft, and I will be engaging with the course director of the department on how to better strategize to achieve the things I need to accomplish.

C. Industry visibility through partners and exhibitors

The conference attracted a huge number of industrial partners in the pharma and biotech industry such as AstraZeneca and other biotech companies. I used the opportunity to engage directly and intentionally, to understand how these organisations recruit pharmacologists and what they value most in fresh graduates.

I engaged specifically with representatives of AstraZeneca to understand entry routes. Upon their recommendation, I have applied for their graduate programme jobs, and I am awaiting the shortlisting stage due in April. Building on the improvements gained, I have also commenced submitting applications for opportunities in other relevant biotech and pharma companies that suit my profile, with start dates in September 2026. This conference expanded my network zone, and I shall always be grateful for this opportunity.

4. Acknowledgements

I am extremely thankful to the college for making the financial resources available to me to attend through the Keasbey Travel Fund.

As a new postgraduate, I have truly understood the caring and sense of community geared towards growth in UNIV. These are memorable experiences that will stick with me beyond my academic year in Oxford. A heartfelt appreciation to all the donors, decision-makers behind the scenes who made all this feasible. A special recognition goes to our graduate studies officer for the facilitation and guidance throughout this process. Your unwavering solidarity and support are highly appreciated.

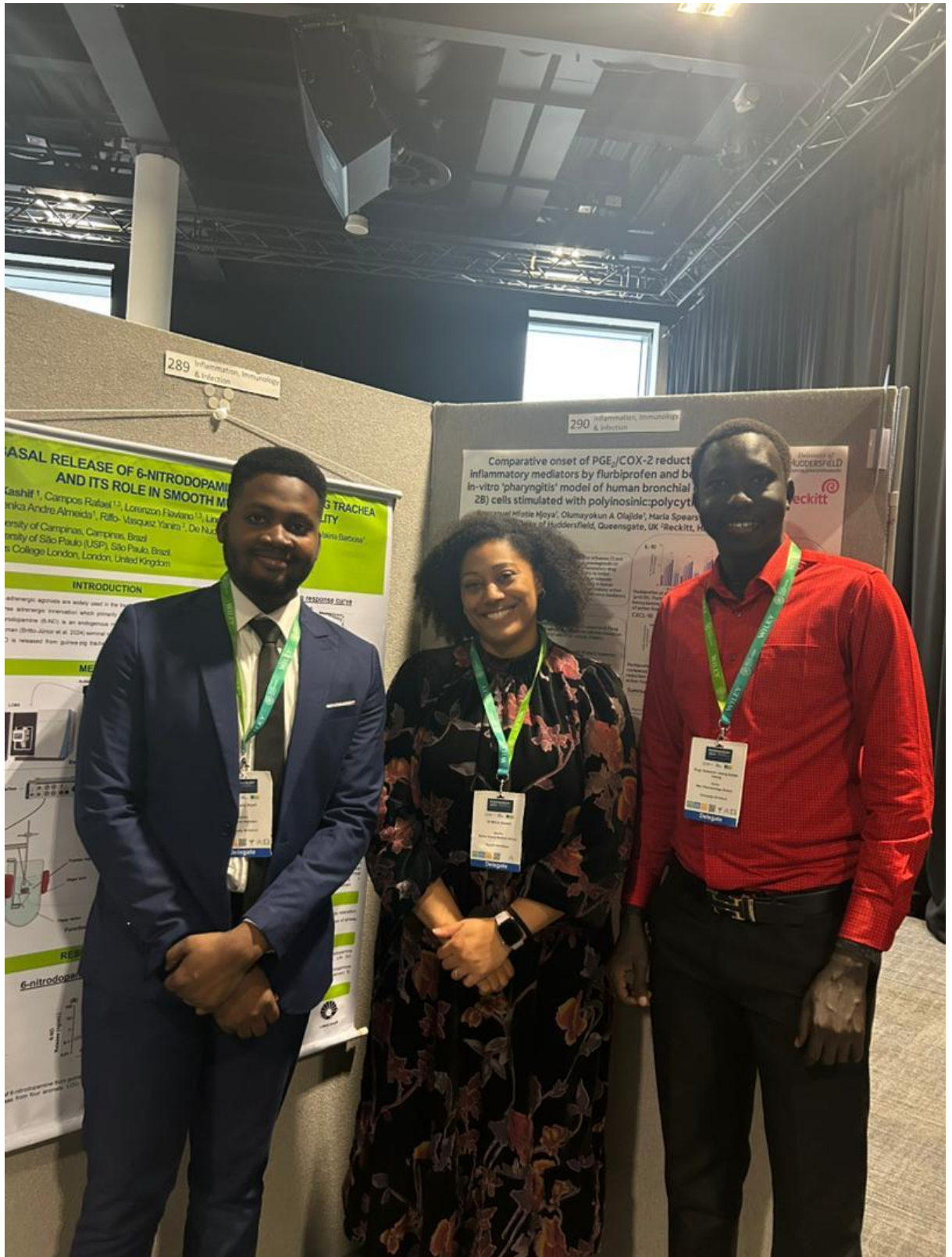
5. Closing reflection

This conference experience gave me an up-to-date view of pharmacology as a field that actively connects discovery science with real-world health impact, while also offering structured career development and networking formats well-suited to an early-stage scientist exploring a move into industry. It was a clear wrap-up of the path I am envisioning to navigate.

CONFERENCE PICTORIALS



A picture taken when I was given a chance to ask a question



A picture taken during a poster viewing session with a researcher from Reckitt



Courtesy Picture with the Founder of Black Medical and Scientific Network during a network event



A picture in front of the Conference Industry partners networking space

Membership benefits

www.bps.ac.uk/membership



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Access to funding via study awards, prizes, grants and bursaries.

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Support from Society staff, members around the world, online resources and more.

