

DBT-InStem Sundowner Session on ‘Research Funding’

New Delhi, Aug 31: The Department of Biotechnology’s Institute for Stem Cell Science and Regenerative Medicine (DBT-InStem) is one of the founding partners of COVID-Gyan, a pan-institutional website that has been proactive in COVID-19 outreach efforts. The website started conducting sundowner sessions during Lockdown 1.0 in collaboration with Bangalore Life Science Cluster (BLiSc) every week for the benefit of the scientific community. The sessions focus on various topics relevant to the COVID-19 crisis.

The Sundowner Session on August 21 focused on ‘Research Funding’, a topic that’s relevant to the entire research community. In recent times, the issue of funding has become a cause of concern for science. The session was hosted by Dr. Vineetha Raghavan, Grants Manager at BLiSc.



The poster for the Sundowner Session on Research Funding features a blue and orange color scheme. At the top, it reads "Sundowner Session" in a white script font, followed by "Research Funding" in a bold white font. Below this, it says "with Funding Agencies, Research Managers, and Researchers" and "Hosted by Dr. Vineetha Raghavan, Grants Manager, RDO at BLiSc". A paragraph of text explains the session's focus: "In recent times, the issue of funding has become a concern for some researchers, labs, and science in general. Join speakers from a spectrum of funding agencies, research management offices, and post-docs and faculty, in this vital discussion." The poster includes several icons: a DNA helix, a bar chart, a hand holding a coin, a lightbulb, a computer monitor with a dollar sign, and a magnifying glass. A dark blue banner at the bottom of the text area contains the date and time: "AUGUST 20 | THURSDAY | 05:30 PM IST". Below the banner is a "REGISTER HERE" button with a blue icon and the URL "tinyurl.com/14Sundowner". At the very bottom, there are logos for "COVID Gyan", "BLiSc", and "covid-gyan.in".

The discussion panel included Dr. Meenakshi Munshi of Department of Biotechnology, Dr. Ajay Pillai, Head of the Project Cell, NCCS-Pune, Dr. Anirban Chakraborty, Director-Research & Development at Ashoka University, Vidhya Krishnamoorthy, Grants Coordinator at THSTI-Faridabad, Dr. Vivek Dham, Advisor - Research & Innovation Delegation of the European Union to India, and Dr. Srinivasa Kaveri, Director-CNRS Office in India.

Apart from funding agencies, this session was attended by research managers/administrators, students, postdoc fellows, faculties and scientists- from early and senior career stages from various research organisations.

The thrust of the discussion was on how the current pandemic has impacted funding agencies and thus the availability of funds to researchers. The discussion highlighted that existing funding from DBT, DST, EU and CNRS has not abated and, instead, more COVID specific avenues have opened on fast-track mode.

DBT fellowships have been extended to reduce the impact on graduate students and postdoc fellows, especially those in the last phase of their work completion and program tenures. Research in foreign universities, new EU and French funding opportunities, and visa related concerns were also discussed in this 100 minute session.

Scientists from organizations like CCMB, Hyderabad, IISER-Pune, and NCBS-Bangalore acknowledged that researchers with fellowships have not been financially impacted, but those on PI funding have been. Also, the COVID crisis has brought to the fore issues that have simmered in the background for years, e.g. the need for childcare, incentives and career

development support for early career researchers. How these six to eight months of lockdown and its aftermath will be assessed on job and fellowship applications remains unclear though. This session is available on the COVID-Gyan YouTube channel.

DBT-inStem also did live tweets during the session.

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