



# ISCT TALKING WITH GIANTS

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International Society  
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Cell & Gene Therapy®

## **Darwin J. Prockop Mentoring Award – Catherine Bollard, MBChB, MD**

*The International Society for Cell & Gene Therapy is proud to present the inaugural 2021 Darwin J. Prockop Mentoring Award to Catherine Bollard, MBChB, MD, for her dedication and service to her colleagues and the field.*

Dr. Catherine Bollard is a world-renowned expert in immunotherapies for cancer, whose work focuses on the deployment of cell therapies to strengthen the immune system against cancer and other inflammatory diseases. In conjunction with her leading-edge work in the lab and clinic, Dr. Bollard has demonstrated a consistent drive to enhance the opportunities and growth of those who work with her through mentorship, and has been a key leader in the cell and gene therapy space through roles across several major organizations including FACT presidency and ISCT past presidency.

But how did she get here?

Dr. Bollard's passion for cell and gene therapy stems from a painful moment, when her best friend in high school had passed away due to complications from EBV+ Hodgkin's lymphoma treatment. Despite entering remission, the treatment options available at the time had difficult side effects and outcomes for patients. The story of her best friend would drive Dr. Bollard to work with cellular therapies, and eventually, to work with several established mentors in the field: Drs. Helen Heslop, Cliona Rooney, and Malcolm Brenner.

Within this team, Dr. Bollard would find early successes, including a novel and successful cell-based therapy for Hodgkin's lymphoma.

Thinking back, she attributes the effectiveness of this team, and the momentum built from her early success, to the selflessness of several mentors who provided advice not only around careers and science, but also around life. “In working with translational science, especially in cell and gene therapy, a cohesive and effective team is critical,” she says. “Part of this lies in having a breadth of scientific expertise, but team effectiveness is also built on mutual trust, support, and on mentors being ready to pitch in with ‘boots on the ground.’”

Dr. Bollard recalls this perspective being driven home by a particularly poignant moment in her life, when her father had passed away just before the deadline of her first POI as a co-principal investigator. During a moment of difficult grief and complex deadlines, her mentors Helen, Malcolm, and Clio stepped in with ‘boots on the ground,’ working to help edit, write, and offer both project-based and emotional support to ensure that the critical project deadline could be met.

Moments like these continue to inspire Dr. Bollard's approach to mentorship today. Recognizing that early career life comes with balancing commitments in writing, scientific analysis/design, long-term goal setting, and financial and emotional challenges, she adopts a supportive approach based on building trust, being consistently ready to step in, and

prioritizing the mentee, especially when it comes to career-builders like authorship.

“Watching my mentees (clinical, basic, and translational) give their first talks as grad students/fellows and then seeing their rise to symposium speakers at national and international meetings is so rewarding,” says Dr. Bollard, reflecting on the impacts of being a mentor. “...at a personal level, listening to the struggles we all face in science and medicine and balancing the stressors of home life and work, and just taking the time to listen and supporting them through the process brings true meaning to my role as a mentor.”

Thinking generationally across cell and gene therapy, Dr. Bollard points to the need for mentors and their mentees to stay grounded: “...in our field, it was hard to find a critical mass of (especially) academic physician-scientists in the generation ahead of me who had a durable marriage/life partner relationship, children, NIH-funded laboratories, and clinical responsibilities,” she reflects, thinking towards life around the lab. “While we are still in the minority, there are more of ‘us’ in my generation to build that ‘critical mass,’ which I see as so incredibly important as we groom the next generation of scientists and physician-scientists to develop and lead the next

‘first in human’ cell and gene therapy trials from bench to bedside and beyond.” While the science races ahead, Dr. Bollard stresses that it is critically important not to lose sight of the people behind the profession. For mentors in particular, being mindful of the factors that build resilient lives outside of the lab will mean that teams develop trust, and become more effective in their mission.

She ends with a few words to take away, “No matter what one chooses to do as a career, it is critically important that you are, above all, passionate about what you do and the career choices you have made, as well as your vision for the future. This will get you up in the morning, and hopefully, inspire your mentees to build the same degree of passion and vision for the work! A successful career is always a combination of luck, serendipity, and a lot of hard work and we must always learn to roll with the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, understanding that sometimes good things may come easily, and other times, they may not. And, for sure, sometimes everything may seem to be depressingly hard, especially around manuscript or grant rejections. But at the end of the day, don't lose sight of what inspires your passion. And never forget to take the time to sit back, listen, and above all, to have fun.”