



# NANOSTEM

Developing new **NANO**materials for neural **STEM** cells drug delivery

# Newsletter

Issue 5 — February 2021

*Welcome to the 5th issue of the NANOSTEM newsletter*

Since the last issue of the NANOSTEM Newsletter, two major events happened: Summer and Christmas holidays.

We also had three successful online training events: the 3<sup>rd</sup> NANOSTEM Summer School, the Joint Training School with NanoCarb and the Workshop on Translational Neurology in December, at the end of which this pretty photo of our fellows was taken.

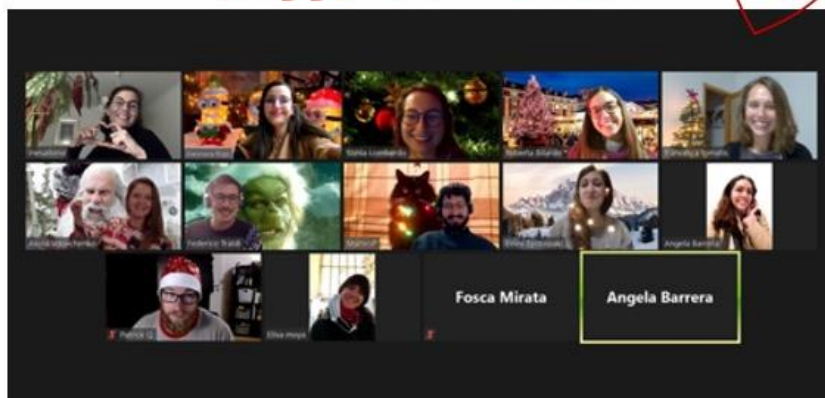
In this issue our ESRs will tell us what has been happening in their lives in the last 6

months. Amid new restrictions, travel bans, home-working etc, our fellows are still bursting with joy and positivity! They are happy to be able to go to their beloved labs and keep doing their experiments, although not as freely as they would like to.

We also asked our fellows what helped them the most during this tough 2020 and we collected their thoughts in the next few pages.

Have a look inside and read more about their experiences and how they have been affected by the pandemic.

*Happy New Year!*



*From the  group*

*This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 764958.*



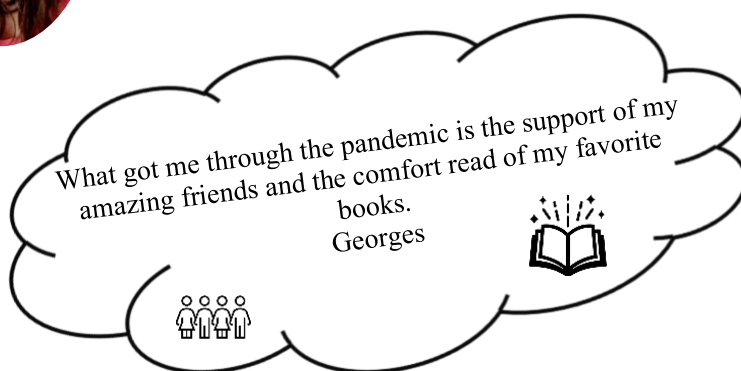
**Queen Mary**  
University of London

## What helped you through this tough 2020?



It is hard to pick just one thing that help me through this hard time. Films and series, books and music sure made it all way easier, but if I had to choose just one thing, that would be **people**. Simple as that, staying in touch with my loved ones through videocalls or even just texts made my days past faster and happier. Just a little talk, a few laughs and knowing that everyone was safe got me through everything.

Sara



What got me through the pandemic is the support of my amazing friends and the comfort read of my favorite books.

Georges



The support of family, friends and colleagues. We are all going through the same experience and talking about it and fining ways to cheer each others up (doing exercise together via webcam, suggesting book and movies) made me feel less alone.

Matteo





Even if I always believed to have no artistic capacities, I started following watercolor painting on YouTube to pass the time. I am no Monet, but I am quite proud of my progress!  
Sonia



Riding my new bicycle allowed me to feel free, able to go far from my home and without the pressure of keeping social distancing.  
Roberta



Two things that are helping me to get through lockdown are running and drawing. By running I was mostly inspired by Eirini – she signed us up for a half-marathon that should happen in May (finger crossed). I have never run such distances before, but it can be a good motivation to keep active lifestyle while many other sport activities are not possible. Drawing is also a great hobby that help to switch off your mind and recharge on the weekend.  
Alena




Keep in touch, skype, whatsapp, anything. Just talk to your family and friends. It could really make the difference in a bad day.  
Angela





Rediscovering lost passions and finding new interests gave me motivation to cope with last year.  
Federico



 This period made me realize how important it is taking care of ourselves, even with apparently small actions: eating good meals, read a nice book, call the people we love, use a nice perfume, exercise. We don't need to work all the time; we can breathe and find happiness in small things.  
Francesca



Gardening during lockdown, helped me release the stress of sitting in one place for too long  
Inès



 Remote netflix parties + going for a lockdown-walk  
Patrick





I did a lot of things during quarantine like learning how to play ukulele, read a lot of books, watching movies and sports and learning Spanish but nothing helped like Running! In these runs I befriended different animals, discovered beautiful places close to me but most importantly I found my inner peace.

Eirini



Since I was young books have been my faithful companions in all stages of my life, including this particular time! But since the extra extra free time I also enjoyed another of my hobbies: knitting! Here there is photographic proof of quarantine knitting!

Eleonora



Preparing the dough was close to a sport, that raised up my energy to work while yeast fermentation time. After 2-3 long/intensive hours of non-stop work, knead the dough helped me to distress; then, while the dough and ingredients were cooking in the oven, I had some other 30 min of high-concentration time to continue. Finally, enjoy eating my own awesome pizza ended in a much happy work time with renewal energies to finish everything was needed! :P

Totally recommended!!

Elisa



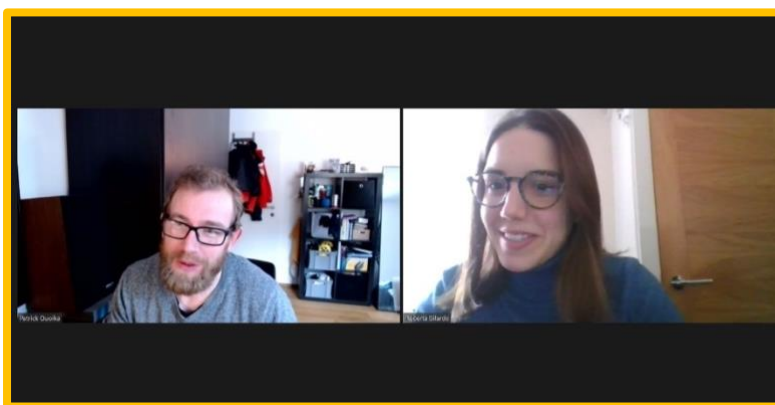
## An intense but surprising December!

*An article by Roberta Bilardo*

It will not be surprising if I say that my PhD has changed quite a lot since the beginning of the “coronavirus era”. Although it has been a while since we resumed our experimental work, all the activities including face-to-face discussion and in person collaboration are now filtered by our laptops.

Among these, my secondment hosted by the University of Innsbruck which took place remotely.

Nevertheless, thanks primarily to Patrick’s tutoring, it turned out to be a very interesting and formative experience. Initially, given my generally modest approach with informatics, the idea of understanding even the basics of computational chemistry seemed almost impossible to me. And, I have to admit, following



*Screenshot of one of my Zoom calls with Patrick during my secondment*

what Patrick was doing during the first call was very difficult. Then, little by little, I moved my first steps in using programming tools and computational software...what such a source of pride when I got to do the first simulations on my own! Starting from that moment, every step forward sounded like a new challenge making me more and more engaged in exploring this new world. Additionally, this secondment was an excellent occasion for me and Patrick to exchange a lot of tips from our different scientific background and to have a more complete vision on the results we were looking at.



*Volcano Etna on the way back to my hometown*

After these two weeks of intense training, it was very recharging to spend the Christmas break with my family, in Italy. Even if restrictions did not allow any big gathering, we still spent the festivities in the most typically Sicilian way: cooking a lot of traditional food and enjoying it during infinite meals. Also, it was very nice to (safely) meet some old friends. This time together reminded me as the mutual support is one of the keys to think positive even during hard times.

This renovated awareness made me ready for the same, old adventure: coming back to London and throwing myself into my loved lab life!

*Roberta*

## **The second half of 2020.**

*An article by Sonia Lombardo*

Hello dear readers. On my side, it feels like the second part of 2020 passed quite uneventfully. I enjoyed the Summer holidays to go back home in France and then I was back to Germany. A few weeks after my return, France was again classified as a risk area by German law, which would prevent me from going back home again until the Christmas holidays. During the time in between, I followed a simple routine of work-sleep-repeat. Life in the countryside was already quite calm in normal time, it was even more so during the pandemic. Thankfully, I still managed to stay in touch with my friends during numerous Discord calls.

At work, COVID regulations became more and more strict. To not be considered a contact case, one should not be in a room longer than 30 minutes with another person. Implementing this rule was quite complex: we all had to switch offices, be extra careful about the time spent in the lab with other people, and sometimes do home office.

I occasionally got to go to Saarland University to drop some samples over. It was a nice chance for me to catch up with the people there, which I had not seen since last March. Some people left, new people came, but the nice atmosphere there was still the same.

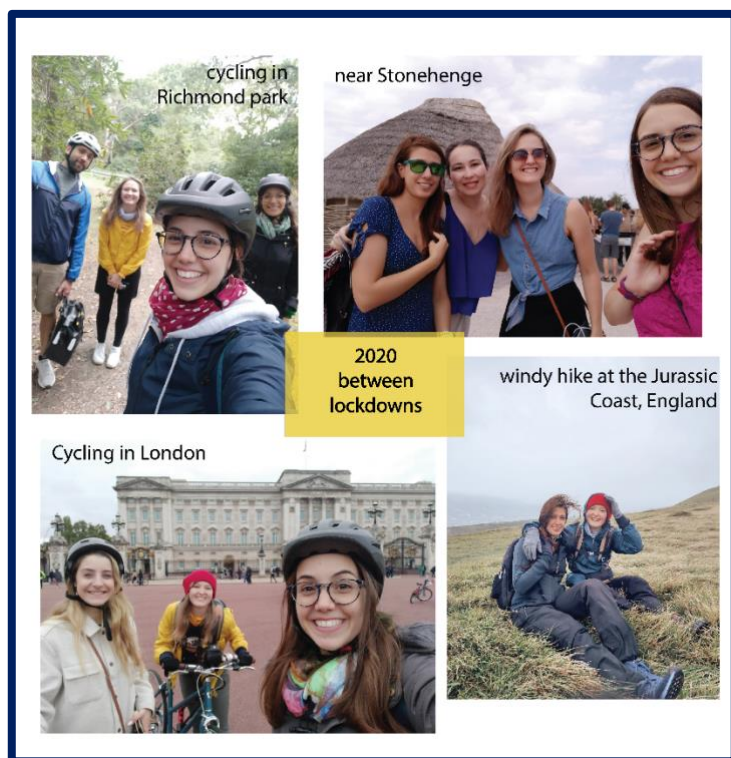
It was also nice to catch up with the others NANOSTEM fellows during the two online workshops we had in September and in December. I am always amazed how easy it is to talk to these guys like we are all old friends.

December came and with it the Christmas holidays. I felt excited the whole way back to Paris and it was quite nice to be reunited with my family and loved ones, despite knowing that a 10-day long quarantine was waiting for me when going back to Germany. As the only child, my mom would have been quite disappointed if I could not have made it. These two weeks really cheered me up and it was hard to leave, not knowing when I would be able to come back. I am however hopeful about 2021. I did not take any new resolutions for this new year (I know myself too well to think I will find motivation to exercise) but I have faith that 2021 will bring a decrease in COVID cases and a (hopefully successful) end to my PhD.

*SONIA*

## Life during pandemic

*An article by AlenaVdovchenko*



The first lockdown has shown that you need to live your best life right here and right now, because the next lockdown can come at any moment. The second half of 2020 was full of new emotions and open-space contactless activities – I had bought a bicycle and we cycled a lot around London. Then I tried disc golf and climbing, we went on a few very nice hikes with my always-up-for-adventure-buddy Eirini. A highlight of the summer 2020 was also our weekend-trip to Stonehenge and Winchester with Roberta as a calm and confident driver of the

group, Eirini as a party queen and myself as a committed inspirer.

Since most of the outdoor activities were banned after the second lockdown, the time for home-based hobbies has come. Baking has become a new popular activity in the department (a picture with our Christmas cupcakes is included). At the same time, I had found myself enjoying drawing and had started to do some paintings for friends. In terms of research, the year was quite interesting as well – the most memorable events were, probably, two workshops organized by the NANOSTEM and a Chemistry Communicator Challenge, in which I was lucky enough to participate. On the CCC event, I gave a short and fun presentation about the chemistry of fear, which was very fascinating since I had an opportunity to present something not related to my research, but still exiting and interesting.



*Alena*



## What we are doing will be worth it.

*An article by Angela Barrera*

Almost one year ago all this started, unfortunately the situation continues. Everyone is dealing and struggling with all this. The number of cases is increasing, the hospitals are collapsing, the measures are changing, lockdowns, curfews. It is all what we listen everywhere now, nowadays due to the social media it is very easy to get information and understand what it is happening in the other side of the world. In Portugal the situation was not so bad at the beginning, due to that, many activities continue ongoing, and fortunately the research activities in the University as well. Our PhD research has not been stopped completely, except for a couple of weeks in March-April last year. I feel very lucky about that, because the project is ongoing and because it also means that I do have a position, especially, during this difficult time. It also keeps me a bit distracted and with a lot of things to do, because it is not easy. It is not easy to avoid being sad and worried, it is not easy to focus seeing everyday what is happening around the world, furthermore when the ones you love are thousands of kilometers away.

During the summer here in Portugal the measures got a bit lighter and it was possible for us to go outside again, restaurants were open so we had the opportunity to enjoy a bit of the summer; with the girls we could go to see the sunset at the Ocean sometimes and we could even celebrate my birthday. Francesca and Ines surprised me in the office with a delicious cake and pretty decorations, another day we went to Coimbra to meet Sara, then we went together to eat delicious food in a Mexican restaurant. Those are ones of the greatest memories I do have from my time here in Europe. Because if



something matters during the difficult times is the support, the love, and the company you can get from people that you

care. It always makes easier to deal with everything.



I did not have the opportunity to go to Colombia, not during summer or for Christmas either. First, because the flights were not available, and then, when the frontiers started to open, I thought it would be too risky for me to do such a long a trip, where I could get infected and then bring the virus to my family, which became my biggest fear. I have not seen my family for more than two years, then I also

thought that, once there, I would have not been able to see my friends and family as I would have had to keep distance and quarantine. This made me think it was not worth it at all. I really hope the situation will get better. Now there is hope of the vaccine and all the new strict measures that are being implemented. I really hope, I really want to be able to hug the people I love soon again.

This is a difficult time for everyone. Keep in touch with family and friends helps a lot. All what we are doing now will be worth it at the end. The intensive work of the health care workers, the scientist studying and producing the vaccine, the Governments trying to keep everything ongoing, organized, and peaceful, and all the population out there making efforts to survive within an economy that is collapsing, where many people lost their jobs or their business due to the restrictions to avoid the spreading of the virus. All of us are trying to continue following the rules, to keep the distance and to try to resist to the desire of meet people that we love. Everything and all the effort we are doing will be worth it, it will get better someday. At the end we will look back and we will say, we made it, we are together, and we went through a PhD in a foreigner country during a pandemic.

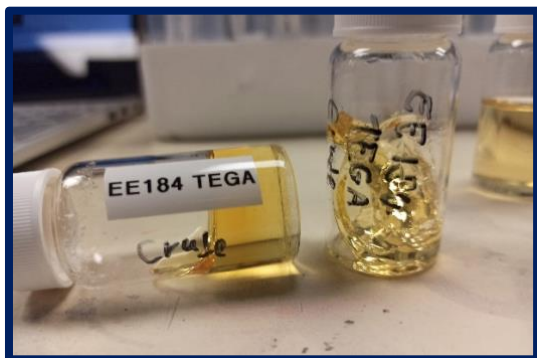


Angela

## My return to the lab, finally!

*An article by Eirini Epitropaki*

When my supervisor told me that the lab was reopening in August, I was ecstatic. Due to the quarantine I wasn't able to go to the lab for 4 months. I always knew I love the lab work more than writing, but I also realized how much I missed the bad and the good things that were happening to



Poly-Triethylenoglycol Acrylate self-healing hydrogel.

me in the lab. Even the failed experiments were opening new aspects of scientific interest, that I could talk about it with my lab mates (from a safe distance of course). I had synthesized a monomer before lockdown and to my surprise, when we returned it had self-polymerized and created this amazing self-healing hydrogel, which was incredibly cool and safe to play with so we thought that it would be great for an outreach program.

Apart from that, coming back to the lab was a great time to start the Great British Bake Off again. Each person from the lab chooses the player that they believe have the most potential to win and during the show based on the eliminations, you are trying to recreate the sweets they were requested to make. Because we are a lot of people in the lab, each player can be chosen multiple times but each person will have to recreate their own sweet. This sends the whole laboratory to a sweet overdrive, since you can have a huge variation of biscuits, cakes, cupcakes, brownies and everything else you can imagine. Recipes and techniques are discussed thoroughly and of course fantasies about recreating everything with laboratory equipment. I successfully made my effort by baking a fluffy fruit cake and honed my baking skills while trying out new and exotic sweets. Beside the baking competition in the lab I had to focus to a cooking competition with my roommates at home as well. Nothing can beat the feeling of being well fed.



Tortellini carbonara (top left), Fluffy fruit cake (top right), Apple crumble with custard cream (bottom)

*Eirini*

## Quality time with my family amid the global pandemic

*An article by Eleonora Rizzi*

This is one of the toughest newsletter issue to write so far...

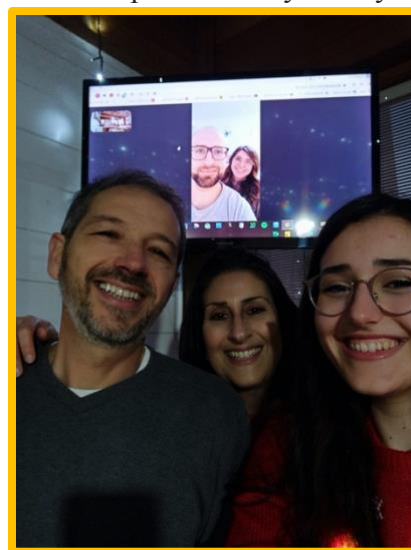
Not too much happened since last June 2020.

We were lucky enough to be able to go in the lab to continue our research in the second lockdown here in France, even if slowly and with some necessary restriction we were able to carry on our experiments and nowadays is not that obvious!

Going back to the last 6 months nothing pop-up in my mind except the time spent with my family.

In this strange period, vacation and the possibility to see your family are really rare, and even if not as frequently as before, I was able to see my family both during summer and Christmas, and I feel extremely blessed by this, since I know not everyone was as lucky as me.

Christmas vacation were definitely different this year, no big family meetings, no board games with friends, no Christmas cookies preparation with my grandma ... it was definitely different, but not in any way less special.



Christmas Eve 2020: me and my parents video-chatting with my brother in Milan.



Being with your family, even part of it, when you are daily far from them is always a joy... even if after 24/7 together, with no possibility to go out there could be some arguing.

For sure this is a period that we will never forget, both for what we lost but also for what we learned!

*Eleonora*

## The fastest 6 months!

*An article by Elisa Moya*

As always, months during a PhD thesis, goes by so fast! And here I am, a few months left to complete my third year of PhD thesis, thanks to NanoStem project!

During these last six months, I had the opportunity to finish my 9-month secondment, in the private pharmaceutical company, HCS Pharma. I did learn a lot there, and we finally successfully achieved our research objective, allowing us to start preparing my first article now! However, this happened through two COVID-19 waves. Hence, facing also difficulties, as many people affected for the pandemic. In my case, the consequences of the first lockdown were related to lack of time and materials for my lab work. I was specially missing the main material for developing our research model. Hence, this ended in one more month of lab work delay!! Thankfully, because of an overexertion in the last months, strongly increasing the experiment speed, we finally did it!

However, while waiting for material, I took the opportunity to profit of some summertime brake in Spain. Despite of the little fear of traveling in this pandemic situation, on August I finally decided that was the moment to visit my family in Granada. I enjoyed a lot with them, especially because of a new baby nephew who was born some months ago, and I was wishing to meet in person. This summer year in Granada was more difficult, since going to beach and public pools was always



La Alhambra from the viewpoint in la Abadía del Sacromonte. Granada, summertime 2020

continuously risky, and thermometer some days reached even 45°C! But, fortunately, one of the main characteristics of our city, is that during night, temperature decrease until reach a comfortably point. Hence, it was the perfect timing to go to any calm viewpoint and lovely enjoy our beautiful and historical city.

Then, after the materials arrived, I finally had the chance to strongly continue my research, coming the months that I could funny describe as “very intensives lab-cave months”. NanoStem project also

offered us the opportunity to follow two online events in September and December which made me exit for a bit from my lab-cave. Hence, after this effort, rewards became in a very lovely family time during Christmas and a lot of data to analyse aiming to be published soon!

Now, here we are, in the middle of the COVID-19 third wave, but with illusion, strangeness, and good hopes for all of you. We will do it! Bon courage!

*Elisa*

## Discovering new passions during pandemic

*An article by Federico Traldi*

In this stressing situation, full of uncertainty and unknown, I found it very helpful to dive into alternative sport activities. One thing that helped me a lot during these months is my new passion for climbing. I started with my first practices in Italy during summer and I decided to continue in London in a gym close to the University. I find this activity good for balancing the working day in the lab and as a way to refresh my mind. Not sure if it is the challenge of reaching the top of the climb or (most definitely) the fact that I am much focused on not falling from the wall, but climbing throws me to a completely different space, far from the hectic life in the laboratory, where I can rest from the everyday life. No doubts this had a major positive impact on my ability to cope with the current crisis.



I was also lucky enough to travel at the beginning of September. In fact, I had the chance to travel to Scotland, right before the number of cases in the UK started rising again. I have been in Scotland before but this time the idea was to visit the countryside and hike around the glens. The weather was



surprisingly good and allowed me to fully enjoy the landscape around Inverness and Lochness. The vast and astonishing landscapes of the Highlands definitely gave me a boost of positive energy before diving into the cold months of the year. In December, Nanostem organised a wonderful event

entirely focused on the clinical aspect of neurodegenerative diseases. The event featured a great variety of scientists and experts, from biochemists investigating the fundamental aspects of neurodegenerations and developing new systems to improve their treatment, to the clinicians applying that knowledge and technologies on the patients they treat. As a chemist this was an extraordinary opportunity to explore a world that may seem distant but, yet, much entangled to the field of chemistry. I particularly enjoyed the chance to directly observe how therapeutic and diagnostic tools that are developed in the lab can dramatically improve the condition of patients. Although remotely, the event was also a good opportunity to see all the ESRs again and a wonderful occasion to bring our spirit up after long months of pretty poor social engagement.

*Federico*

## Exploring home during the summer holidays

*An article by Francesca Tomatis*

I had the luck to go home twice in the last six months. However, during the Christmas holidays we were forced to stay home due to the rules for the Covid situation, but during the summer we had the opportunity to be tourists in the place that we usually call home, where there are many breathtaking landscapes that is always good to visit again or to discover for the first time.



My brother and I in Nice, France.

I went back home on 15<sup>th</sup> August. I landed in Nice, France, where my brother and his friends were spending the holidays. We had fun in the city during the day, sunbathing on the beach and tasting the traditional “farciis niçois” and the “socca”. But the best moment was the BBQ on the beach in the evening. We laughed a lot and sang while some friends were playing the guitar: an unforgettable beginning of holidays.

My parents joined us to spend the weekend at the seaside: we explored small villages full of art galleries and wonderful restaurants, but we also prepared a fantastic fish BBQ at our place.

I spent the rest of my holidays at home, in Italy, using the time in many different ways. For example, I went to Gino Paoli’s performance in Alba: a concert during a pandemic, with people sitting far away from each other and wearing masks, will be for sure an experience I will not forget. I finally visited a bit more the area of Langhe, the famous UNESCO World Heritage site homeland of Ferrero and Nutella.

I exploited the fact of being home for so many days (it was not happening since years) to go hiking on the mountains close to my place, discovering pathways I had never followed before and spending also one night in a lodge managed by some of my brother’s schoolmates. One day my family decided to do a bike tour, too, and it was amazing reliving the memories of when my brother and I were children and we were spending afternoons like this.

The best part of those holidays was the possibility to meet friends and finally hug again my family. I was so grateful I could spend time with my grandparents and eat my mum’s meals. I really missed them a



The “black lake”, in the Alps, close to my home.

lot during the lockdown of the spring 2020, so I tried to take advantage of every single second together to create memories and simply enjoy their company. We also discovered we are a funny “family



band”: my brother singing and playing the guitar, my father playing the accordion and my mum and I trying to play the piano. Luckily no one was listening to us!

These unusual times makes me appreciate even more the time I can spend with people I love, and I cannot wait for the day we’ll be able again to travel a bit more in order to see them more often and share unforgettable moments.

*Francesca*

## Going online with Zoom

*An Article by Inês Albino*

Covid-19 has made Zoom, WiFi, virtual school, telemedicine and mobile apps to reinvent the wheel. In a very short time, these tools were introduced in our everyday lives and have consequently changed them. Particularly, the Zoom video chat app has become a necessary part of my life. Since March, I have attended lab meetings, workshops, friends and family reunions or even weddings all through Zoom. During this time of isolation, Zoom helped us to stay connected.

Hence, more and more in-person events were moved to online events. In our network we had to adapt to the new circumstances as well. So far, the NANOSTEM Summer School, the NANOSTEM-NANOCARB Joint Training School and the NANOSTEM Workshop in Translational Neurology were held via Zoom and surprisingly, that was a success! Whether we like it or not, such platforms have allowed us to run such events, which otherwise would have been cancelled. Furthermore, they have allowed bringing people, which would not have travelled from so far sitting in the same Zoom room. The advantages are countless, but the drawbacks associated with having a screen between the interlocutors should not be disregarded. Being online doesn't allow you to look around and see different perspectives, while sitting in front of the computer for too long can be exhausting. Besides, nothing's more frustrating than the Internet connection going in and out.

In my experience, Zoom has been incredibly helpful. Personally, for someone that does not like to be on stage delivering oral communications from home and on camera is much more comfortable. Zoom helped me building more self-confidence. Nonetheless, I am looking forward to meeting the NANOSTEM team in person again and I believe to have benefited from those experiences.

*Inês*

## Here we go again. Or still?

An Article by Patrick Quoika

Since the last Nanostem newsletter, the second lockdown has started in Austria. As of now, the second peak of infections is actually flattening out. Or is the third peak about to start? I am sure that I am not the only person who, at some point, lost the inspiration to follow the news on a daily basis anymore. Generally, weeks are melting, and the order of events is blurring a little bit. I guess we are all curious how we will look back at this time in history in a few years from now. Possibly, the Nanostem newsletter is going to help us remember these days a little bit.

I believe I am actually working more than before the pandemic even though in the evening it sometimes feels as if I really did not do much during the day. For me, personally, 2020 was de facto kind of a productive year. Which is obviously great, especially, since I am aware that it was a very tough year to go through for many other scientists. During the last months I did most of my working from home. Fortunately, for me this is quite manageable. At the theoretical chemistry department in Innsbruck, we are working in shifts these days. Therefore, I may go to the office twice per week. These are usually my favorite days, because in the hallway I may *randomly meet* my colleagues, which is always nice. By now, social distancing is pretty normal already. Still, these short interactions sometimes mean a lot, especially because my colleagues here also evolved to be good friends of mine.



Partly, the above may read rather negatively, but it really does not feel so bad actually. It is more a description for reference, I guess. Something I would tell people during the *usual COVID small talk*, these days. I think the situation is similar for many people and if I compare, for me it is really not terrible. What I dislike the most is the fact that it is basically impossible to plan ahead, especially, in terms of travelling.

Sure, I also miss the non-pandemic social life, but then again, I feel like over

the months we arranged ourselves kind of well to be social in a digital way, didn't we? We may have digital coffee breaks, movie nights, also gaming nights... Well, over time we got creative, right? Even though the Friday nights are not really *the same* as before the pandemic, they are still nice.



For a few weeks now, it is actually possible to go skiing here in Austria. Already before COVID, I liked skiing a lot, but these days it is clearly my favorite hobby. Also, we had quite a lot of snow here

in Innsbruck lately, which is great for skiing, but bad for traffic... These were indeed some of the days on which I thought: “Well there are some advantages of home office...” I think in that respect I might indeed keep some quite positive memories of this winter.

Alright, let’s drop COVID for a while, shall we...

Another question that I am currently asking myself is: “What happens next?” As many other ESR’s of Nanostem, I started the third year of my PhD a couple of months ago. Accordingly, I may theoretically (pun totally intended) finish my studies within the next year. And afterwards... Exactly, there are many different options. To me, all possibilities have some brilliant advantages, however at cost of some clear disadvantages. Also, this decision seems to influence life on so many levels: How is work going to be like? Where will I live? Is the next station going to be just another station, or shall it be more of a long-term position? I might potentially *get back home* or *stay here*. Instead, I may also decide to *go somewhere new*... To me, this decision is very hard to make, and I am not sure if it is easy for anybody really. Up to now, I was not able to decide anything. Therefore, I am curious what the future may bring and where to go next.

PATRICK

## Back on track!

*An Article by Sara Bernardo Castro*

I never thought that work could give me such a peace of mind, but after the hard quarantine months, being able to go to work every day and keep the project moving feels amazing!

Soon after the lockdown in Portugal finished, I re-started my secondment at ICNAS picking it up right where I left it in March, and I was (finally!) able to work with the PET and MRI scans. The clinical part of NANOSTEM is moving! As exciting as this was, it was also hard enough. Learning to coordinate between two teams (CHUC and ICNAS) and trying to understand all the secrets of nuclear medicine is not an easy job, luckily for me, summer holidays were around the corner and I was able to go back home after half a year!

August, the month of reunions. Even if it was with COVID measures it was amazing to see my friends and hug my family again. A break month completely necessary to confront the hard work September had planned...



Autumn colors in Coimbra.

Back in Portugal after summer break, MRI and PET scans started to catch speed and soon enough, the NANOSTEM-NanoCarb joint event took place. It was amazing to see everybody again even though it was via zoom!

Months full of work but also new knowledge and experiences! Thanks to my secondment at ICNAS I am learning not only how to analyze MRI scans but also what is really the nuclear medicine, how exactly does a PET scan works, the huge number of possibilities for diagnosis and research...

Month passing, work moving, Christmas arriving...and a new NANOSTEM event, this time Workshop in Translational Neurology! Finishing December, I was more than happy to have reached the inclusion of more than half of the NANOSTEM patients! I was ready to take a break a go home after four hard months...

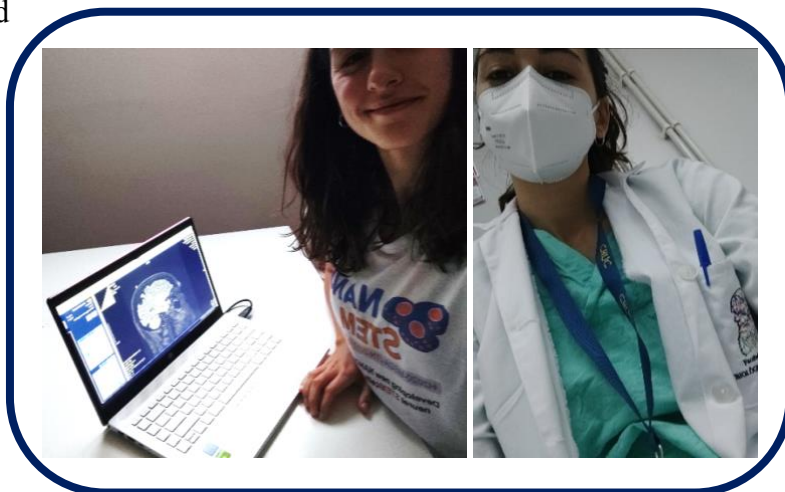
Christmas break was amazing. I was able to enjoy my city, my family and the snowy mountains of my home! And before I realized it, I needed to go back to Coimbra again.



Snow and mountains! The amazing feeling of being home.

Now, Portugal is facing a second and strict lockdown due to COVID-19 and the feeling of uncertainty came upon me again...luckily this time the project keeps moving.

In order to adapt to the new situation and stay as safe as possible I am currently combining homeworking with presential work. Always with safety measures but always moving forward!



The two faces of the new lock-down: Home working day (left) vs. Hospital working day (right).

Let's make 2021 memorable!

*SARA*

## Reminiscing about the past year

*An article by Georges Kiriako*

Looking back at the past year and a half since I started my PhD, I realized how easy it is to overlook valuable progress when spread over a long period. The research done in this lab and the magnificent results, have been an experience like no other to me, and recognizing the big steps taken along the way is my most treasured realization yet. Besides the academic life, I have to say that I met amazing people, explored cities and nature reserves in Sweden, read interesting books and went through a terrifying pandemic.

To be completely honest, the strange idea of staying home to save lives this past year struck me as quite appealing. A time to start working on all those little plans and dreams that pop in my head, I thought. However, in spite of the fact that this had not changed the way I spent my time drastically, reorganizing my daily schedule taught me an invaluable lesson in discipline. The Pandemic awarded me my first exposure to the afternoon shift, which I've grown fond of. The free mornings granted a special quality to my days, waking up in peace to my own thoughts shared with my morning coffee, reading my book in a fresh new light, a time to expand my cooking skills and getting used to my own home meals, and most importantly a chance to experience home not as a place I fall onto after long days, eat, sleep, and go back into the world, but as a sanctum to my mind, the place or state that prepares me to go out into the world.

I believe I can look back at this period so far with personal and academic progress. I've understood just how much I appreciate this calm organized lifestyle as opposed to my previous hectic and distracting one. My only regret was missing out on the training and conferences that I was looking forward to attending abroad, and I could only hope that I get a second chance to learn from all that I've missed out on.

Georges

## **Creating a new virus-friendly routine**

*An Article by Matteo Puglisi*

Around the first birthday of Covid19's arrival in Europe, Germany and many other nations are still dealing with the strong impact that the pandemic had on everyone's lives. In fact, many people consider 2020 as a year of missed opportunities and stasis. I partially disagree with that and I feel that a lot of things changed since the virus hit our lives. For example, we had to find a way to snap out of the state of emergency and start living again, but differently. For me, the second part of 2020 was all about creating this new emergency routine. Rules that sounded crazy at the beginning of this pandemic became a normal part of my life. One rule that affected me a lot was social distancing. Being an expat, my friends here in Germany are also a sort of family and it was hard stopping hanging out all together the way we used to do before. We can still meet in small groups, but this is just not the same. We had to find new creative ways to spend time together. Playing games, gossiping, and drinking via webcam was weird and chaotic at the beginning, but now is just chaotic. Such "friendship proactivity" is definitely one of the good lessons that Covid19 taught us. Also, I am lucky because some of the people I like the most here are also my lab mates and it means I can see them more often than others, obviously keeping the distance and for a short time. Talking about lab life, I was used to alternate unpostponable experiments with more flexible ones and useful spontaneous scientific chats. Now, nothing of this is possible anymore. The time in the lab as well as face-to-face meetings have been reduced to the necessary minimum, in favour of home office, quick comments in the corridor and mostly online sessions. The adjustment was not easy, but it brought some advantages too. For example, I had to really work on my planning and organizing ability in order to be as efficient as possible during my work time in the lab. These skills have never been my forte and I am training them hard right now (with some lukewarm results). Moreover, not only the meetings of my lab but also the whole world ones have been moved online. This has been a great educational opportunity for me since I had the chance to listen to amazing and inspiring scientific talks from the best institutions of the world directly from my sofa. The international scientific community has never been so close as during this pandemic! Nevertheless, not all that glitters are gold and my home table became my new lab desk. I am sure it is not happy to be covered by a ton of coffee cups, papers, hard drives, and screens, but that is the price of science, I guess. Writing about everything that the Covid19 pandemic





taught me makes the last months sounds like a great thing! Even if I am trying to see the glass half full and taking the best out from this new routine, I am really looking forward to going back to my old life and habits. Hopefully, if everyone behaves responsibly, it will be soon enough!

*Matteo*

# Forthcoming events

## Network events



- 3<sup>rd</sup> NANOSTEM Summer School. 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2021, Arras, France
- 3<sup>rd</sup> NANOSTEM International Meeting, 8<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> July 2021, Arras, France.
- Satellite NANOSTEM meeting within the ESB Conference, Porto, Portugal (TBC)

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