

2024 New York RNA Symposium in the Finger Lakes - Summary

The 2024 New York RNA Symposium was held October 14-15 at the Hotel Canandaigua in the Finger Lakes region. This year's event was not only a gathering of leading scientists and researchers, but also the inaugural meeting of the **Center of Excellence in RNA Research and Therapeutics (CERRT)**, a joint venture between The RNA Institute at the University at Albany (SUNY) and the Center for RNA Biology at the University of Rochester. CERRT's mission is to drive the development of RNA-based therapies and train the next generation of biotechnological talent in New York State. CERRT was supported by funding from the Empire State Development's Division of Science, Technology and Innovation (NYSTAR), underscoring the state's commitment to advancing RNA science.

Over the course of two days, more than 240 registrants gathered for an exciting and packed agenda featuring world-renowned RNA researchers, along with many faculty and trainees sharing their scientific presentations covering a wide spectrum of RNA research topics, from basic science to translational medicine.

Keynote Speakers and Sessions

The event kicked off with a keynote by **Dr. Karla Neugebauer**, Director of the Yale Center for RNA Science & Medicine. Her talk, titled "*Visualizing Nascent RNA*", set the tone for a symposium focused on the latest advances in RNA biology and technology. Following her keynote, the symposium featured **three additional keynote addresses**, each exploring different aspects of RNA science: **Dr. Eckhard Jankowsky**, Vice President of RNA Science at Moderna Therapeutics, shared his expertise on the cutting-edge RNA therapeutics that are transforming the medical landscape; **Dr. Sally Temple**, Co-Founder and Scientific Director of the Neural Stem Cell Institute, discussed the promising potential of RNA-based therapies in regenerative medicine and neurological diseases; and **Dr. Blanton Tolbert**, Vice President of Science Leadership and Culture at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, addressed the future of RNA research and its critical role in scientific innovation.

In addition to the keynotes, the symposium featured two invited faculty talks by **Dr. Mitchell O'Connell**, Assistant Professor, Department of Biochemistry & Biophysics, University of Rochester Medical Center and **Dr. Kathleen McDonough**, Director, Division of Infectious Diseases, Wadsworth Center, NYS Department of Health, University at Albany, SUNY.

Contributed Talks and Lightning Presentations

The symposium also featured a diverse range of contributed talks, with **13 trainees (graduate students and postdocs)** presenting their latest findings on RNA research. Topics ranged from RNA regulation and structure to novel therapeutic strategies and RNA-based diagnostics.

Adding to the excitement were **28 lightning talks**, where early-career scientists and trainees shared their research in a fast-paced, 90-second format. This session served as a preview of the poster session held on the first evening of the symposium.

Two poster sessions, featuring over **114 poster presentations**, allowed researchers to present their work in a more informal setting. These sessions provided excellent opportunities for networking,

feedback, and potential collaborations between academic institutions, industry leaders, and trainees.

Diversity Panel Discussion

One of the highlights of the 2024 New York RNA Symposium was the Diversity Panel, which brought together thought leaders from academia and science to discuss the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in scientific research and leadership. The panel was moderated by **Dr. Marlene Belfort**, a distinguished professor from the University at Albany, and featured three panelists: **Dr. Jeanette Altarriba**, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Psychology at the University at Albany; **Dr. V. Kaye Thomas**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmacology & Physiology at the University of Rochester; and **Dr. Blanton Tolbert**, Vice President of Science Leadership and Culture at HHMI and Professor at the University of Pennsylvania. The panel emphasized the critical role of diversity in advancing science, ensuring that all voices are represented and creating an inclusive culture that supports both scientific discovery and career development.

Awards and Recognition

- **RNA Society Membership Poster Awards** were given to:
 - Debojyoti Das, University of Rochester
 - Victoria DeMeo, University at Albany
 - Alexis Dziubek, Cornell University
 - Michelle Mitchener, Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology Centre
 - Gabriela Valdivieso, University at Albany
 - Peter Zhang, University of Buffalo
- **Outstanding Research Poster Awards** went to:
 - Asmar Aliyeva, University at Albany
 - Dadrian Cole, University at Albany
 - David Goich, University of Buffalo
 - Sakura Hamazaki, University of Rochester
 - Madeline Jensen, University of Rochester
 - Chukwudi (Humphrey) Omeoga, University at Albany
- **Outstanding Research Talk Awards** were awarded to:
 - Hannah Clary, University of Rochester
 - Joey Tavaréz, University at Albany
 - Andrew Veenis, Penn State University

The 2024 RNA symposium served as a launchpad for future advancements in RNA research, particularly through CERRT, which aims to foster a robust, collaborative ecosystem for RNA science across academia and industry.