

Thanks to the assistance I received from the International Travel Award, I was able to attend the 19th Annual Meeting of the International Alliance of ALS/MND Associations and the 22nd International Symposium on ALS/MND in Sydney, Australia. The focus of the conference was to bring together researchers, clinicians, and families from across the globe that study or are affected by Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Motor Neuron Disease (MND). The symposium offered a wide variety of topics to learn about in both scientific and clinical sessions, and I was able to sit in on lectures with topics ranging from genetic disease markers to the effects of multidisciplinary care teams and palliative care. My favorite sessions were those which focused on assistive technology, a topic very closely related to my own research where I hope to pursue a career. These sessions introduced me to several new high-tech tools which are being developed to aid those with ALS/MND, as well as some older technologies which I was not familiar with. I was also able to interact closely with many international scientists and clinicians to gain a more global view of research goals and care perspectives.

My own poster, titled “P300-Based BCI Use by People with ALS: A Comparison of Presentation Methods and Cognitive Strategies”, was very well received at the conference and was the only poster to focus on Brain-Computer Interface technology. The focus of my research is the optimization of a P300-based BCI for independent use by individuals with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) and other degenerative neuromuscular diseases. To help these patients communicate, a BCI system uses brain signals to control a computer communication program. My goal, based on previous research, is to determine whether new presentation methods or cognitive strategies can optimize system accuracy for individuals with ALS. I was able to discuss my research with many clinicians and families, some of which had never even heard of BCI technology, which I hope will help further the development of the system globally.

I have a true passion for helping people to live a more fulfilling life through my research, and I believe that attending this symposium helped to put BCI research in an international light. Being in Sydney for a week, I was also able to see many cultural landmarks and experience the city’s main travel attractions, including the Sydney Opera House and Bondi Beach! I am so grateful to have had this wonderful international experience, and thankful to the ALS Hope Foundation and the Drexel Office of International Programs for helping me to get there.

