

Reflections on IMS2026

I have to start by thanking those who have generously donated money to the UKMS enabling my travel grant, particularly the Michael Morely Foundation and the UKMS platinum sponsors: Binding Site, GSK, Johnson & Johnson, Menarini Stemline, Pfizer and Sanofi. Thank you also to the UKMS executive committee for selecting my abstract for the award.

It is truly an exciting and disorientating time to work in the field of myeloma. This really hit home for me, during the opening of IMS2026 where Nikhil Munshi finished his talk with a slide that read "Myeloma is a Curable Malignancy" in giant red letters. I'd seen the results during the last few years, but somehow, the broader picture and all the implications that need unpacking had escaped me. Seeing the sequential survival curves stacked on one another, rising higher and higher took me back to a BSH presidential session on paediatric ALL where the same curves told the story of a condition we now accept, not just as curable, but as cured. Later that evening, during dinner with the consultants, I put this to them, asking whether they would start breaking the diagnosis with explicit references to 'curable'. To my surprise, the consensus was firmly against using 'the C word' but instead emphasising the positive outlook for disease control and life expectancy. Underlying this, is that while PERSEUS can project a 17-year PFS, it cannot tell you which patient in front of you has a meaningful chance of being within that small fraction. Bridging this gap requires risk stratification tools robust enough to make 'cure' a meaningful word to the person receiving a diagnosis and looking for anything to cling onto.

They say you should never meet your heroes. Whoever said that clearly didn't attend IMS2026, where Comic Con opened the day the conference closed and I met Spider-Man roughly twenty times, including three in one bathroom. I also met the superstars of myeloma research, whose papers I've been reading for the last three years. My first discovery was that I will never be able to throw down to Gaelic-Rock fusion music the way Vincent Rajkumar can. My second, was that being British presents a serious problem when researchers introduce themselves by first name only, leaving one with the nagging sense that you ought to know exactly who they are. What often followed was a conversation in which I attempted to surreptitiously elicit a surname, before finally landing on "Ohhhh, *that* Leo! I loved your work on spatial heterogeneity!" The obvious solution is that anyone whose H-index passes 30 should be required to introduce themselves surname first, in the manner of James Bond.

IMS was the first conference where I couldn't get to all the sessions, because I had meetings of my own: groups in the USA and Greece suggesting collaborations, plans with UK mentors for how I could contribute to myeloma research after my PhD, and friends from a few years of UKMS scientific meetings to catch up with. All going well, in a few years' time I hope to be unable to attend anything at all.