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International Behavioural and Neural Genetics Society

# IBANGS NEWS Summer 2026: Issue 31

## Letter from the President

Dear IBANGS Members,

It is a privilege and a genuine pleasure to be writing to you as the new President of IBANGS. I have had the good fortune of working closely with Paul Meyer over the past year as president-elect, and I want to begin by thanking him warmly for his leadership, his generosity in sharing the workings of the society, and his good humour throughout. Paul leaves IBANGS in excellent shape, and I look forward to building on everything he and the executive committee have put in place.

The 27th Annual Genes, Brain, and Behavior (GBB) meeting, held June 8–11 at the University of Pittsburgh, was a wonderful way to begin this new chapter. My sincere thanks go to local hosts Sean Farris and Gregg Homanics for making the meeting such a success, and to all the members of the organising and programme committees who gave so much of their time. Pittsburgh more than lived up to its billing — and the Cathedral of Learning is every bit as impressive as advertised. For those who were there, I hope you left as energised and full of ideas and collaborations. For those who couldn't make it, I very much hope to see you at the next meeting. We will update everyone regarding the result of the venue poll- both options were very popular.

As many of you will know, I come to this role from Queen Mary University of London, where my lab works on animal models of psychiatric disease and developmental neurotoxicity. That background makes me particularly alert to one of the most consequential policy debates now facing our field: the future of animal models in biomedical research. Recent initiatives from NIH and HHS have signalled an ambition to expand New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) — organoids, microphysiological systems, computational modelling, and AI — with an explicit goal of reducing and ultimately eliminating animal models in research.

A timely perspective piece by Olivier George and colleagues (The False Choice: Animal Models, NAMs, and the Future of Neurospychopharmacology), recently submitted to Neuropsychopharmacology, addresses this debate head-on, and I would encourage every IBANGS member to read it (once published). Their central

argument is one I find compelling: the framing of animal models versus NAMs presents a false choice. NAMs are genuine and exciting scientific advances, and their role will grow. But for neuropsychopharmacology, psychiatry, and addiction research, they cannot yet substitute for intact animal models. Mental illness and substance use disorders emerge from interactions among genes, circuits, physiology, development, environment, and behaviour — processes that unfold over time in whole organisms and cannot yet be captured in a dish or a silicon chip.

This debate sits squarely within the mission of IBANGS, and I am glad that our new Advocacy and Inclusion Committee — co-chaired by Karla Kaun and Jeffrey Glennon — is positioned to help the society engage with it constructively. I encourage you to connect with that committee, to watch for surveys and action items on the IBANGS website, and to consider how your own voice and expertise can contribute to this conversation at the policy level.

One of my priorities as President is to grow and diversify our membership, and I would particularly welcome input from the community on how best to achieve this. As a society with strong international roots, I am especially keen to strengthen engagement with members based in Europe and beyond North America — whether through meeting locations, online programming, reduced barriers to participation, or other means I may not have thought of. If you have ideas, suggestions, or simply a perspective to share based on your own experience of engaging with IBANGS as a non-US member, please do get in touch. Francesca Telese is our new chair of the membership committee and I'm sure she would be pleased to hear your thoughts. No suggestion is too small, and hearing directly from members is the best way to make sure we get this right.

I also want to draw your attention to our new section on promoting equality, which you will find on the IBANGS website. This is a space for the whole community, and we are actively seeking input in any form — whether that is lived experience, reflections on barriers you have encountered in our field, policy suggestions, or ideas for surveys and initiatives we could run as a society. Equality, diversity, and inclusion are not boxes to tick; they are central to doing better science and building a community where everyone can thrive. I hope you will engage with this section and help shape what it becomes.

Finally, I want to thank the full executive committee (both past and present) for their continued dedication, and to welcome our new members including Anne Simon (President-Elect), Laura Saba (Secretary) and Diego Luiz Rovaris (Member-at-Large). I am looking forward to working with all of you, and to meeting more of our members throughout the coming year, both at in-person events and through our expanding programme of online activities.

Wishing you a summer full of sunshine, good science, and new discoveries.

With warmth and enthusiasm,

Caroline Brennan

## Annual meeting recap

Sharing ideas, forming collaborations, catching up with colleagues and just plain having fun made this year's annual meeting at the University of Pittsburgh a thoroughly enriching experience. Much appreciation to Paul Meyer, Gregg Homanics, Sean Farris, the Program Committee, IBANGS Executive Committee and to the University of Pittsburgh staff for their help in making the meeting run smoothly. A special thank you to all of the meeting participants.

## Meeting evaluation survey results

People enjoyed the science, speakers, organization, venue, staff, community feel, networking, meals, and banquet. Everyone felt welcomed, and nearly all sessions were rated Good or Excellent. Some said that the schedule felt too packed. Several people wanted more downtime, an afternoon off, fewer early starts, and more informal networking time.

## GBB26 select photos

## Annual Meeting Highlights

From left to right: IBANGS President, Paul Meyer and Presidential speaker, Danielle Posthuma: The beautiful University of Pittsburgh ballroom: Outstanding travel awardees: Karina Piotrowska, Myra Bower, Amanda Barkley-Levenson and Zachary Tatum: Keynote speaker, Erich Jarvis: Early Career Awardee, Chongyuan Luo: Local organizer, Sean Farris sharing Brosecco, a Pittsburgh original: Distinguished Investigator Awardee, Leslie Griffith and Karla Kaun, Paul Meyer happily passing the baton to Caroline Brennan: Steve Room CEO of Hello Bio.

## Future Venues Poll

Next year's annual meeting will be in either Valencia University of Valencia or Rome, Sapienza University. The meeting will be held sometime in May. At this stage, the poll results for the 2027 meeting indicate that there was no clear majority for either Valencia or Rome. The deciding factor will be based on costs.

Venues for the coming years under consideration are Puerto Rico, Brazil and Japan.

**If you haven't already voted for the GBB27 venue, you may do so here:**

IBANGS annual meeting future venues vote

## Member News

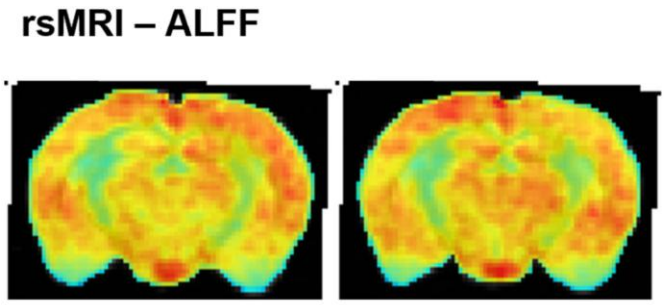
Tsuyoshi Miyakawa, Fujita Health University has created an Orcid metrics extension for Chrome and has kindly shared it with the membership: https://chromewebstore.google.com/detail/orcid-researchmap-metrics/dccgljhegcbbhebdpnmanpikfdekmlgo?authuser=0&hl=ja

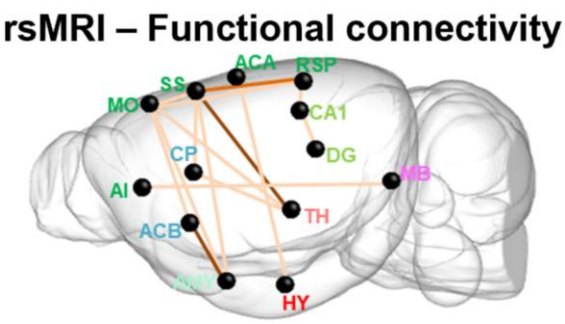
Leo Schalkwyk University of Essex, past IBANGS President and long-time member will be retiring this year. All the best for your retirement Leo. If you find that you have too much time on your hands, there are several committee openings that would benefit from your experience:)

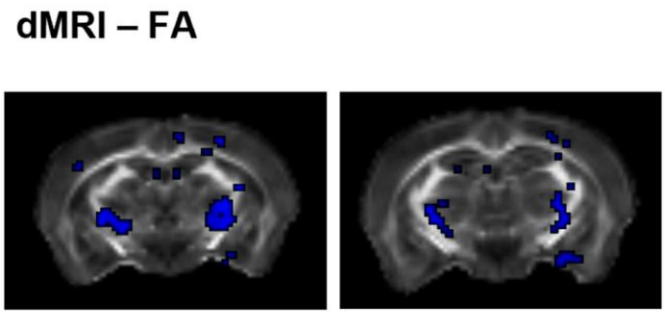
Congratulations to Helen Kamens and her team at Pennsylvania State University. Their study was recently accepted for publication in *Genes, Brain and Behavior*.

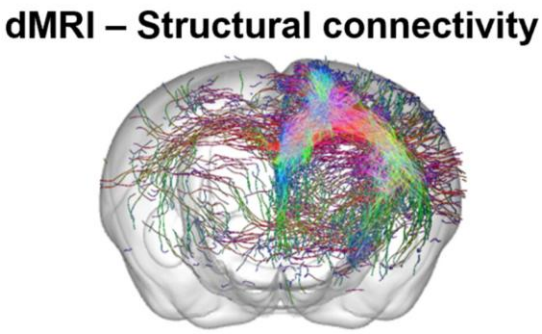
**Dissecting the strain and sex specific connectome signatures of unanesthetized C57BL/6J and DBA/2J mice using magnetic resonance imaging**

Helen M. Kamens1, Tanzil M. Arefin2,3,4,5,6, Hayreddin Said Unsal3,7, Thomas Neuberger2,3, Nanyin Zhang2,3,4




Mouse models are an essential tool for understanding behavior and disease states in neuroscience research. While genetic and sex-specific effects have been reported in many neurodegenerative and psychiatric illnesses, these factors may also alter baseline neuroanatomical features of mice. This raises the question of whether the observed changes are related to the disease being studied (i.e., pathological differences) or if there are baseline strain or sex differences that may potentially predispose animals to different responses. Over the past decade, tremendous effort has been made in mapping neural architecture at various scales; however, the complex relationships including identifying genetic and sex-specific differences in brain structure and function remain understudied. To bridge this gap, we used C57BL/6J and DBA/2J mice, two of the most widely used inbred mouse strains in neuroscience research, to investigate strain and sex-specific features of the brain connectome in awake animals using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI). By combining resting-state fMRI and diffusion MRI, we found that the motor, sensory, limbic, and salience networks exhibit significant differences in both functional and structural domains between C57BL/6J and DBA/2J mice. Further, functional and structural properties of the brain were significantly correlated in both strains. Our results underscore the importance of considering these baseline differences when interpreting the brain-behavior interactions in mouse models of human disorders.

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