Dear ESHG,

I am writing to express my deep appreciation for the enriching experience I had with the Genomics of Rare Diseases group at the University of Exeter.

Under the guidance of Prof. Emma Baple, Dr. Reham Nazzal, and Dr. Joe Leslie, I gained valuable insight into the group's diagnostic and research activities, which primarily focus on investigating rare diseases in underrepresented populations such as the Palestinian.

Throughout the week, I had the opportunity to interact with several team members to discuss and compare bioinformatic workflows and laboratory approaches. I particularly valued the time spent with Jana, a visiting student from Jenin, as we jointly reviewed the exome of a Palestinian patient with a neurodevelopmental disorder. I also shared some of the variant annotation tools and interpretation strategies I use in my research. These exchanges were intellectually stimulating and a reminder of how much can be gained from sharing diverse experiences and approaches.

I also had the valuable opportunity to analyse the exome of a Palestinian patient with spastic paraparesis and familial gastrointestinal tumours, which provided me with exposure to rare disorders and analysis approaches I had not previously encountered.

I enjoyed several group meetings with different team members as well as with the broader rare disease groups at the University of Exeter. This included a Journal Club that sparked thoughtful discussion on harnessing large-scale databases like the UK Biobank to uncover gene-disease associations and improve rare disease diagnostics. I also really appreciated the opportunity to attend rare disease meetings, which included discussions on candidate variants in neurodevelopmental disorders. During one meeting, I shared my background and PhD research, including lessons learnt from investigating a novel likely pathogenic variant in the 3' UTR of a known disease gene.

Beyond research, I also had the chance to connect with Reham, who is leading important work aimed at improving the diagnosis and care for families with rare genetic conditions in Palestine. Her vision for initiatives such as the *Stories of Hope* project, in partnership with the University of Exeter and the Arab American University in Jenin is deeply inspiring. It is incredibly rewarding to be welcomed into this work, and I look forward to supporting this important mission.

This mentorship experience has left a lasting impression on me. As a Palestinian living in diaspora in Australia, I have longed to be involved in supporting families affected by rare diseases in my homeland. I am truly grateful to the entire Exeter team, and the ESHG Education Committee for making this mentorship opportunity possible. I leave this experience with greater insight, motivation, and a deeper commitment to contributing meaningfully to the field of rare disease genomics.

Shukran Jazeelan, many thanks,

Lein