

Interview with Featured Boston Mentor: Ester Caffarel-Salvador



Ester Caffarel-Salvador
Associate Director, Regenerative Medicine
[LEO Pharma](#)

Q1: Currently, you are working as the Associate Director of Regenerative Medicine at LEO Pharma. How did you get into your current work?

I started researching microneedles for transdermal drug delivery about 10 years ago and continued throughout my PhD and postdoc. In 2019, LEO created the Regenerative Medicine department to investigate novel treatments for rare dermatological diseases. I had just finished a project at MIT designing a pill to deliver macromolecules like insulin, so it was perfect timing and I saw this as an opportunity to dig deeper into the cell and gene therapy field.

Q2: Are you originally from the Boston area? What is your impression of Boston as a city to be an entrepreneur?

No, I was born and raised close to Barcelona (Spain). After having lived several years in the UK, Italy, and Denmark, I moved to the Boston area in 2015. Boston has a great ecosystem for entrepreneurs. In fact, Kendall Square in Cambridge has been referred as “the most innovative square mile on the planet” due to the high concentration of biotech research and start-ups. It feels like being in the epicenter of innovation and science. You are constantly being exposed to new ideas and technologies and engaging in deep scientific conversations which might lead to new projects or collaborations. It is a really stimulating environment.

Q3: What are you working on at the moment?

At LEO Pharma, I scout external partnerships and collaborations in the gene therapy field with the aim to find a cure for rare dermatological diseases with high unmet needs. I also support

the business development team and other internal projects with the goal of developing innovative drug modality platforms. In addition, I mentor at the IMPACT program and Sandbox fund at MIT and serve as an advisor for international startups in various programs, including JETRO.

Q4: How has your experience been mentoring Japanese startups through CIC's partnership with JETRO?

So far it has been great. I think there is a lot of innovation ongoing in Japan and it is great that JETRO acts as a gateway to connect Japanese startups to the Boston ecosystem. These types of programs are critical for startups to explore their global potential.

Q5: What do you think are the challenges facing a Japanese startup that is trying to expand its business in the Boston area?

The biggest challenge is the cultural difference. When it comes to business, it is important that a startup uses the same language as its audience (investors or other stakeholders) to pitch their technology. Once, I had a meeting with a Japanese startup where they presented a slide that used triangles, circles, and squares to define the rate of success of an event which is apparently well-known in Japan, but I had never seen before.

Q6: What advice do you have for Japanese startups that are exploring business opportunities in the Boston area?

Do some research on the local market, culture, and regulatory environment. Start building a professional network in Boston, it will be critical to your success. And do not forget to use your JETRO mentors for guidance around potential pitfalls and misunderstandings!