Thanks to the Expedition Fund, I was able to make up the additional funds I needed to pay for my travel to Oxford to do a research project at Wellcome Trust Cancer Genetics, Oxford University, during the summer of 2012.

It was a unique opportunity for me to spend 7 weeks in Oxford and run a project titled: ‘Investigating endoscopic detection methods and molecular carcinogenesis pathways of colorectal serrated adenomas’. This project was conducted in collaboration with Dr Simon Leedham and his team from the Wellcome Institute of Human Genetics, Oxford University and Professor Andrew Silver and the team from Cancer Genetics, Blizard Institute, Queen Mary University of London.

Bowel cancer is the third most common cause of cancer death among men and women in the UK, causing more than 15,000 deaths each year. We used a new endoscopic technology called ‘white light and 3rd generation narrow band endoscopic imagining’ in a back-to-back endoscopic trial design to try to improve detection rates of cancer lesions. I carried out many important and fascinating experiments extracting RNA and DNA from human endoscopic samples as well as mouse. We used Real Time Polymerase Chain Reaction technique for gene analysis and Methylation technique to measure epigenetic changes in the studied tissue samples.

The results we have obtained are very existing and very important. Further exploration of the obtained results has been currently carried out. Just recently I did a talk on the subject and the results of the research investigations at Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry. This talk encouraged long and very interesting and stimulating debates on the subject among clinicians and scientist at the Cancer Institute.

At Oxford I was staying at Queen College accommodation wright in the middle of the city overlooking beautiful Christ Church College buildings and gardens. The college was founded in 1341 by Robert de Eglesfield (d'Eglesfield) in honour of Queen Philippa of Hainault. The college is distinguished by its predominantly neo-classical architecture, which includes buildings designed by Sir Christopher Wren and Nicholas Hawksmoor. Queen’s may be dribbling with history and tradition, but it maintains a surprisingly laid-back attitude. From my neighbours I have found out a fascinating fact that technically, students can still order servants into the cellar to fetch them beer, but now prefer to go
themselves – because the cellar’s a pub. The superb buildings, 600m from Carfax, dominate the High Street, and Queen’s quad and cupola (designed by celeb-architect Nicholas Hawksmoor) leave quite an impression. More northern students are attracted to Queen’s than most colleges and the atmosphere is refreshingly unpretentious. The breakfast which was served daily was just so delicious.

I believe that medical research is vital if we are to improve the lives of individuals affected with debilitating disease. I am grateful to the Expeditions Committee for providing me with the funds to be able to carry out the research work at Oxford University. Taking part in this project will allow me greatly improve my chances of applying for a Higher Degree (Phd) in a couple years. As In the future I would like to become a doctor with a strong research profile.

Yours faithfully,

Tatjana Boitsova