

# ENMC MENTEES

## Dr Lindsay Alfano | Dublin, USA - Mentee 2024



**LINDSAY** is a researcher specializing in the care and evaluation of patients with neuromuscular disorders, is a principal investigator in the Center for Biobehavioral Health and an assistant professor of Pediatrics at The Ohio State University. Dr Alfano serves an integral role in planning and

designing clinical trials and contributes to protocol development, outcome measure selection, statistical analysis, and interpretation for ongoing clinical trials

within the Jerry R. Mendell Center for Gene Therapy and throughout the wider research community. Dr Alfano serves on an international consortium of neuromuscular physical therapy experts that provide industry-standard training and reliability for multisite international trials. Her research goals focus on characterizing the natural history of rare and ultra rare diseases, achieving clinical trial readiness, as well as developing and promoting optimal assessment tools to measure change in movement abilities while minimizing the burden of study participation.

**Lindsay's mid-career mentors are Prof. A. Beggs, Prof. U. Schara-Schmidt and Prof. K. Wagner.**

## Dr Salman Bhai | Dallas, USA - Mentee 2023



**SALMAN** is an adult neuro-muscular neurologist who is the Director of the Neuromuscular Center at the Institute for Exercise and Environmental Medicine and Assistant Professor of Neurology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, USA. His research interests include metabolic and mitochondrial

abnormalities in muscle diseases. Clinically, he focuses on metabolic, mitochondrial, and inflammatory myopathies.

He runs an integrative physiology lab and collaborates with basic and translational colleagues. He has also led biopharmaceutical drug development.

**Salman's mid-career mentors are Prof. E. Hoffman and Prof. A. De Luca.**

## Dr Laure Gallay | Geneva, Switzerland - Mentee 2022



**LAURE** is a MD, PhD specialized in clinical immunology and rare diseases, whose main interests are neuro-muscular disorders, and more specifically acquired myopathies. She has developed expertise in both clinical and basic science and works to link these two areas. Thanks to the AFM-Telethon financial support,

she is currently performing a postdoctoral fellowship at the university of Geneva, carrying out investigations on the

involvement of muscle stem cells in the pathogenesis of inflammatory myopathies. She aims to work in the public hospital setting, to pursue mixed clinical and scientific activities, and develop translational research in this specific field of interest.

**Laure's mid-career mentors are Dr C. Wallgren-Pettersson and Dr A. Mammen.**

## Dr Margherita Giannini | Strasbourg, France - Mentee 2023



**MARGHERITA** is an Italian MD PhD, rheumatologist and physiologist, working in inflammatory myopathies (IM) clinical and translational research in Physiology department of the Strasbourg University Hospital (France), in the Prof. Alain Meyer research group. During her PhD, taking advantage of IM preclinical

models, she elucidated the mechanism of glucocorticoids therapeutic effect in IM. Her research projects aim to

understand the molecular mechanisms specific of IM subgroups to develop dedicated treatments based on pathophysiology. Margherita has been recently named Associate Professor in Physiology at the University of Strasbourg, and she co-supervises several students in the lab at the Biomedicine Research Centre (CRBS) in Strasbourg.

**Margherita's mid-career mentors are Prof. O. Benveniste and Dr A. Mammen.**

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## Dr Saskia Houwen | Nijmegen, The Netherlands - Mentee 2023



**SASKIA** is a paediatric rehabilitation physician in the neuromuscular centre of the Radboud University Medical Centre in the Netherlands. She combines her clinical tasks with research activities, under which sponsored initiated clinical trials. Her PhD has focused on future perspectives of adult males with

DMD and on females with dystrophinopathy. Her research is characterized by the impact of disease signs and

symptoms on social participation and how to support the resilience of people with NMD and their families. Her aim is to interweave care activities with her research, in which barriers in care situations are the base for new research proposals and research results are directly implemented in the care situation for all children with NMD. She is a board member of the Duchenne Center of the Netherlands and the working group of Dutch rehabilitation physicians working with NMD, and is World Muscle Society Program Committee member.

**Saskia's mid-career mentors are Mrs S. Foye and Prof. C. Gagnon.**

## Dr Mert Karakaya | Cologne, Germany - Mentee 2022



**MERT** is a Turkish pediatrician, currently in the final year of his residency in Human Genetics at the Institute of Human Genetics, University of Cologne (Germany). He is also working as a clinical post-doc at the same institute in the research group of Prof. Brunhilde Wirth. His main research focus is on neuro-

muscular disorders of childhood, on the identification and characterisation of their genetic causes and molecular

pathomechanisms - in particular Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) and non-5q SMAs. Mert had been previously selected for the early career scientist program and attended one of the ENMC's workshop in 2015.

**Mert's mid-career mentors are Prof. C. Bönnemann and Prof. M. Vainzof.**

## Dr Piera Smeriglio | Paris, France - Mentee 2023



**PIERA** is a dynamic principal investigator at the Myology Institute in Paris (France), leads a diverse group of researchers dedicated to the study of motor neuron diseases. With a deep interest in the epigenetic regulation of these conditions, she employs advanced multi-omics technologies to identify potential

therapeutic targets. In 2020, Dr Smeriglio's exceptional work was recognized with the prestigious EU

Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellowship, furthering her research into the complex epigenetic factors influencing motor neuron diseases.

As a tenured research scientist at INSERM since 2022, Dr Smeriglio is committed to translating laboratory discoveries into clinical applications, promoting a seamless integration of research and patient care. She also places a strong emphasis on mentoring the next generation of scientists.

**Piera's mid-career mentors are Prof. A. Aartsma-Rus and Dr A. Beggs.**

## Dr Eric Voorn | Amsterdam, The Netherlands - Mentee 2022



**ERIC** is working as a senior researcher at the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine of the Amsterdam University Medical Centers in The Netherlands. His primary research interest is on preserving and improving physical functioning of people with neuromuscular diseases, by means of physical activity,

exercise and nutrition. The target group is slowly progressive neuromuscular diseases, including post-polio

syndrome, Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease and muscular dystrophies. Eric has received several grants for national and international projects and important goals of his participation in the ENMC mentoring program include to further extent his international collaborations and to increase visibility of his work.

**Eric's mid-career mentors are Prof. V. Straub and Prof. A. Oldfors.**