

Profile of an Early-Career Researcher



Dr. Erika M. Vieira Araujo

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This issue's Early Career Profile highlights Dr. Erika Vieira Araujo who is currently a Research Investigator at Arvinas, a biotechnology company solely focused on bringing PROTAC® molecules (heterobifunctional protein degraders) to the clinic. As a medicinal chemist, Erika co-leads several projects at Arvinas aimed at using targeted protein degradation to treat cancer. Within this role she has learned how to use her knowledge of medicinal chemistry to design tripartite "beyond Rule of 5" molecules, consisting of a ligand to a targeted protein, a linker, and a ligand capable of recruiting an E3 ligase. Alongside her colleagues at Arvinas, Erika is working to understand the unique and fascinating biology, pharmacology and physicochemical properties presented by this therapeutic modality.

Erika Araujo earned her Ph.D. in organic chemistry under the supervision of Professor Amir Hoveyda in 2013. During her doctoral studies, she discovered novel methods and catalysts for the enantioselective preparation of amines and alcohols. Her research at Boston College was recognized with several awards including an AstraZeneca Fellowship, an Eli Lilly Travel Grant, an Abbott Scholar Award, and several invited presentations. Prior to her graduate studies, Erika obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry in 2006 from Fairfield University where she was introduced to research by Professor Joseph Sarneski.

Following completion of her Ph.D., Erika joined Bristol-Myers Squibb in the Discovery Chemistry group in Wallingford, Connecticut. She worked on both hit-to-lead and lead optimization programs for the identification of selective kinase inhibitors for oncology and immuno-oncology indications. Her time at Bristol-Myers Squibb rooted a passion for medicinal chemistry and oncology which ultimately led to her current position tackling malignant proteins with chemically induced proteasomal degradation.

Erika has been a coauthor on nine publications and patents and was an invited speaker to present on PROTAC® degraders at the Fall 2019 ACS MEDI Rising Stars: Women in Medicinal Chemistry Symposium. She also volunteers her time to serve on the ACS Division of Medicinal Chemistry Executive Committee as a Member-at-Large since 2017 as well as chairing the Young Medicinal Chemists Committee for MEDI. In her role with MEDI, she is focused on energizing and attracting the younger generation of drug discoverers to become engaged members of MEDI. She is also a proponent for the use of social media for science communication and outreach.