

Careers in Global Health

Written by Nesrin Rechache, Postdoc in NCI

Have you considered a career in the Global Health or International Development fields? Have you ever wondered how to transition into these fields with your PhD degree?

FelCom's successful Career Development Seminar, "Careers in Global Health and International Development", hosted 5 distinguished speakers from the Global Health and International Development fields. Dr. Andrew Clements is a Senior Technical Advisor with the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Global Health Bureau. The Global Health division involves work in reproductive, maternal and child health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, influenza and pandemic threats. Dr. Clements talked about his career path which began with a PhD in anaerobic microbiology at Virginia Tech followed by a Postdoctoral position at the National Cancer Institute. He then completed an AAAS Science and Technology policy fellowship and a Johns Hopkins child survival fellowship. His current work involves the prevention of the spread of avian influenza in the Amazon, Central Congo, South Asia and South East Asia. His greatest challenge in transitioning from the bench was changing from a narrow focus to a broader one and learning how to work on projects that required interaction with several people from varied backgrounds. Dr. Clements said that working with public health and international professionals, helping them overcome problems and learning how public health is done in other countries was very rewarding. In his current work, he has also had the opportunity to influence how avian influenza science is congressionally funded. If you are looking for a career in public health that involves interaction with people from many different international backgrounds and also requires flexibility, creativity, and problem solving abilities, then Global Health and International Development may be the right career path for you. Dr. Clements pointed out that there are two main paths to a career in global health - the more direct path of completing a Masters in Public Health and a second through fellowships like AAAS and the Global Health Fellows Program with USAID. The annual USAID sponsored Global Health Mini-University program at the George Washington University Center for Global Health was also recommended.

Our second panelist was Dr. Andrew Serazin, a Senior Program Officer in Global Health Discovery at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Dr Serazin was a Rhodes Scholar and received his doctorate from the University of Oxford where he researched the use of genomic technologies to accelerate drug and vaccine development against infectious diseases. The Global Health division of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation primarily focuses on infectious diseases in children and maternal/newborn health. Dr. Serazin's work includes projects such as the improvement of pregnancy and maternal health in Ghana, analyses of the causes of maternal and newborn death and the supervision of a late stage clinical trial for a new malaria vaccine in Mozambique. He emphasized that 80% of his work is team based and that one must be flexible, willing to take risks and try new things, stay motivated, and demonstrate excellence and leadership in science. While

there are positions listed on the foundation website, Dr. Serazin emphasized networking and interacting with hiring managers, to be able to land a job in the Global Health field.

Dr. Jose Ramiro Cruz Lopez, our third panelist, is a Senior Advisor of Health Technologies for Quality of Care at the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a regional office of the World Health Organization (WHO). A native of Guatemala, he received a Master of Science in tropical public health and a Ph.D. in virology and immunology from Harvard University. Dr. Lopez was driven by a desire to give back to his community and transitioned from technical virology lab-based work to epidemiological field work in nutrition and infectious diseases in children in Guatemala. His scientific publication in vaccine associated polio-2 infections caught the attention of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), PAHO and USAID and eventually led to his career at PAHO. Dr. Lopez's current work involves analyzing technical data, and publishing guidelines and recommendations for the prevention of dysentery and respiratory infections, along with the promotion of breast feeding, blood donation and transfusion safety. He also travels to various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in order to advocate for support and implementation of PAHO guidelines. Dr. Lopez recommended starting with internship opportunities at PAHO in order to get greater experience in the global health field.

Dr. Akiko Maeda, Lead Health Specialist at the Health, Nutrition and Population Department of the World Bank, was our fourth panelist and transitioned from "tissue culture to development policy". She began her science career in molecular biology, x-ray crystallography and biophysics but wanted to contribute to the improvement of society and so transitioned away from the bench to a master's degree in Middle Eastern studies from Harvard University. She followed this with field-work experience as a Junior Professional with the United Nations and other international organizations. Dr. Maeda then returned to Harvard for a Ph.D. in Health Economics. Her current work involves addressing issues in health financing and insurance reforms, and the motivation and retention of the health workforce in remote areas of developing countries. She mentioned that project management, organization skills, and the ability to work with people from different backgrounds are critical skills. She also said that technical scientific backgrounds in vaccines are needed for short-term advisory positions, but global health hires at the World Bank generally have public health and, more recently, regulatory backgrounds. Dr. Maeda ended by saying that while the World Bank primarily recruits mid career and senior level staff, there are limited positions open for Junior and Young Professionals that are a great way to get exposure to the global health and international development fields.

Our last speaker, Dr. Flora Katz, is the Deputy Director of the Extramural Division of the Fogarty International Center (FIC) at the National Institutes of Health. FIC builds capacity for global health research through partnerships between investigators in the US and in developing countries. She began working in international countries through the Thomas J. Watson fellowship, doing wildlife research in Israel, Zambia, and Malawi. She then received a Ph.D. in cell and molecular biology from M.I.T., followed by another internationally based Henry Luce Foundation fellowship, doing wildlife census and

ethno-botany work in Indonesia. Following the fellowship, she completed postdoctoral work and worked for 15 years in academia before she transitioned again and completed an AAAS Science and Diplomacy fellowship at the FIC. Dr. Katz has been with the FIC since. Dr. Katz's role at FIC involves program management and development of natural product drug discovery and biodiversity conservation, genetics training, informatics training, multidisciplinary global health education for universities in the US and abroad, and policy. One example of her policy work involved representing the NIH's position to the State department on access and benefit sharing of genetic resources in foreign countries. She has also represented the NIH position at WHO. Dr. Katz's ability to transition into global health was in part due to her diverse scientific expertise, multidisciplinary and broad interests, her ability to be proactive and learn new things, and previous experience conducting research internationally through fellowships. She recommends finding mentors in the global health field, taking FAES global health classes, and completing fellowships related to the global health and international development fields. Dr. Katz also mentioned that the global health field involves not just science but also politics, sociology, economics, cultural understanding, and policy.

In summary, if you are considering a career in global health/international development, expand on your scientific Ph.D. background, by applying for fellowships and junior and young professional programs. Also consider expanding your skill set by including international work and collaborations and networking with those already in the global health and international development fields.