

Dr. Shaida Moghaddassi, Scientist II at Intrexon Corporation,

Dr. Swagata Kar, Scientist/Principal Investigator, R&D at BIOQUAL Inc.,

Dr. Atsuko Sakurai-Sangria, Scientist, GSK Vaccines.

FelCom Careers in Industry: Research and Development

Panelists began by discussing where they worked and the methods they used to reach their current positions. Drs. Moghaddassi and Sakura-Sangria highlighted the importance of networking as both utilized contacts from conferences or old supervisors in order to obtain their current positions. Your advisors might not be able to help you beyond academia, but most of them will be supportive and happy for your career choices. Similarly, some industry positions are not advertised since hiring managers prefer to hire through their contacts. Many of the job postings are a formality because the hiring managers already have in mind who they will hire. On the contrary, Dr. Kar discussed the significance of networking with recruiters from local hiring agencies including Kelly, Medix, and Aerotek and as one method to get into industry.

As part of their job profiles, all the three panelists oversaw one or more research groups. In achieving this goal, they highlighted the role of being a multitasker. None of them were involved in performing much of the bench work as part of their day to day. Instead, they communicated with potential sponsors, made budgets and timelines for current and potential projects, wrote project proposals or grants, trained technical staff and aided junior scientists in troubleshooting. Soft skills such as effectively communicating with others to explain technical and scientific material to individuals of different backgrounds were also mentioned to be important. Being an independent thinker and thinking out of the box to troubleshoot were also necessary skills. Dr. Sakurai-Sangria encouraged the trainees to undertake NIH sponsored RO1 writing training as some small biotech companies rely on grants rather than investors for money. Dr. Sakurai-Sangria asked 20 colleagues at work, who emphasized communication, adaptable, team player, quick learner and open-minded as crucial in their industry positions.

Prior to obtaining their current positions only Dr. Sakurai-Sangria went ahead to pursue substantial postdoctoral training. Dr Kar conducted a short, around four-months, postdoctoral training at NIH/ NCI before determining the position was an unfit and accepted an industry position. Dr. Moghaddassi went directly into an industry position. A postdoctoral position may provide training for the necessary technical or social skills needed for an industry position but is not necessary.

Not all industry positions will aid in visa sponsorships.

In determining which positions to apply to, remember the employer is more interested in seeing that a candidate is a fast learner and adaptable than that the candidate completely matches the qualifications. This should not be demonstrated with a lengthy publication history or a long list of technical skills on one's resume. Rather, interested job seekers should consider listing publications relevant to a job, provide a summary of their technical skills and expertise, at the top of the resume, and a list of relevant achievements. Sending a tailored resume to each position rather than a generic one will increase one's chances of getting the desired position.

All the panelists pointed out that job security in the industry is a myth, and you need to be constantly networking, and immediately put yourself out to your network once you realize you need to find the next job, be it because your team will be decommissioned, or your current position is not a good fit. This is the reality for the industry, but don't worry too much because the experience you gain at your current position is very marketable for your next position. It's super important to get your foot in the door, i.e., get your first industry position. Sometimes you need to take a position that is not ideal. Another good thing about the industry is that the supervisors are very engaged in your career development. Your supervisor will ask you to set your own annual goals, which will largely determine your promotion.

The NIH OITE office offers resume writing workshops. Sign-ups are on the OITE website under upcoming events.