

National Institutes of Health



Visiting Fellows Committee

NIH VFC Newsletter

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Contributing to global science development by building careers

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Where are they now?

From Bench to Policy

An interview with Dr. Matt Wenham

By Heba Diab, PhD

A common dilemma experienced by many postdoctoral fellows is initiating and navigating a path towards a non-bench scientific career. I recently had the opportunity to ask Dr. Matt Wenham, Executive Manager of Policy and Projects at the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) about his transition from a research-centric postdoc to a science policy analyst and manager.



Former NIH Visiting Fellow, Dr. Wenham discusses his transition into science policy

National Technology Challenges: energy, agriculture, water, health technology, infrastructure, mineral resources, innovation, and STEM education. Dr. Wenham's role is to manage a small team of research and policy officers to provide policy advice and prepare statements for various government agencies or industry. While most of ATSE's policy work is aimed at Australian governments (federal and state), they also work closely with the Council of Academies of Engineering and Technological Sciences (CAETS), an international body of Academies of Engineering. Furthermore, they run several programs as part of the European Union Horizon 2020 program and bilateral programs with China, the UK, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and others.

Dr. Wenham completed his postdoctoral training at the NIH in the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) in April 2012. He currently lives in Melbourne, Australia and works for ATSE. This organization – Australia's national academy of engineering and applied science – works across eight

Dr. Wenham knew early during his scientific training that he did not want to pursue a career in academia. Although he enjoyed research, he preferred working across a broad range of topics rather than becoming specialized in a narrow field. Being at the NIH not only provided great research opportunities, but exposure to valuable non-bench related training as well. During his time at the NIH, Dr. Wenham participated in the NIH Science Policy Discussion Group, the Visiting Fellows Committee, the NIDDK Fellows' Advisory Board, and served as the Basic Science Co-Chair for FelCom. He also edited the NIDDK Fellows' newsletter and wrote articles for the NIH Catalyst. Additionally, he volunteered with a few scientific organizations, such as Scientists and Engineers for America and the Institute on Science for Global Policy (ISGP).

It was through volunteer opportunities with ISGP that he was offered a full-time position as Associate Director. The ISGP is an independent think tank that aims to increase and improve dialogue about public policy issues impacted by science and technology. As Associate Director, he managed programs on emerging and persistent infectious diseases, food safety and security, and synthetic biology. Although there were some complications regarding his visa status, the ISGP knew his capabilities from his volunteer work and was willing to sponsor him. He worked there for nearly two years before returning to Australia to work as a policy associate for a health and education policy think tank. While there, he was offered his current position at ATSE.

What is particularly interesting about Dr. Wenham's career path is that he never applied for any of his policy positions; instead, they were presented to him specifically through his connections and social network. For example, his current job was offered to him after an informational interview with the CEO 18 months prior to his offer. Although having a research background was helpful in understanding the content of the work presented to him and gave him credibility, it was not essential. Rather, Dr. Wenham believes he was competitive for the positions he received because he showed both, an

interest in policy and also demonstrated experience in doing the work that the organizations required.

I inquired about Dr. Wenham's greatest challenges with moving away from the bench to the environment he is currently in. He replied, "Losing control over my own time." As a researcher you are essentially able to set your own hours and priorities. However, most of his work now is dictated by other people, deadlines, closing dates, media cycles, etc. While he admitted this was difficult to adjust to, he credits his experience in research for developing and fine-tuning his time management and prioritization skills that are now key in his current job.

Finally, to succeed in a career in science policy, Dr. Wenham recommends that a person take any opportunity to write. Writing manuscripts is not enough; one needs to practice writing compelling and clear content in non-academic settings for a broader audience. Secondly, being well practiced at presenting is also valuable. You should be able to express ideas and converse not just with experts, but with diverse audiences as well. Lastly, he suggested building up a network of people who are working in your fields of interest. Much of his current job involves knowing the right person to speak to about certain topics; and as discussed above, eventually led to every position he held after his postdoc.

Overall, Dr. Wenham made an effort to participate in groups that allowed him to not only gain leadership, management, and communication skills, but also explore and establish his own interests. Furthermore, his network was not solely built on handing out business cards. Rather, he made an effort to get to know people and importantly, have them know and understand the value he presents to their organization.

The contents of this article were approved by Dr. Wenham.

Where are they now? Making the Transition to Industry as a Senior Scientist -

An interview with Dr. Sima Hirani

By Ping Chen, MD, PhD

Postdoctoral fellow Sima Hirani, Ph.D., graduated from University College London and joined Dr. Nussenblatt's laboratory at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in 2012 to conduct research in Clinical Immunology. After three years of postdoctoral training focusing her research on understanding the mechanisms of autoimmune uveitis, she decided to move to industry. After a few months of job-hunting, she recently accepted a senior scientist position in a company called Adaptimmune (<http://www.adaptimmune.com/>) where she will be responsible for clinical research in autoimmune diseases. This next step in her career path will still allow her to continue research, but focusing more on product development that would directly serve patients in need.

The following is the conversation with Sima:

Q1: What was your key qualification for getting this job?

A: The company, Adaptimmune, is well-established in cancer research and now expanding their work in the field of autoimmune diseases. They were looking for a scientist experienced in immunology, especially with a background in autoimmune diseases. My training experience at the NIH along with a research background in autoimmune uveitis, CD8 T cells and T regulatory cells primarily qualified me for this position.

Q2: What training that you undertook at NIH helped you get this job?

A: NIH is an excellent research institute, which makes me be a strong candidate with outstanding research training. For example, I have processed human blood and done different types of *in vitro* immune assays. I had the opportunity to meet and

interact with many great scientists and learn from them. I have presented scientific talks in various conferences. All these training opportunities have fostered me into a mature scientist.

Q3: Where did you find the information regarding this job?

A: I found it on the company website and sent them my resume.

Q4: How did you prepare for the job interview?

A: I consulted with OITE at the NIH who helped me restructure my resume. An academic CV focuses on education and publications, while an industry resume focuses on achievements. The resume is much shorter than a CV.

Q5: What was the most challenging part during the interview?

A: Talking to the Chief Scientist and the Director of the company was very challenging. I needed to know the company's strategy, structure, and background. During the interview, the company tried to understand whether my personality would fit the position and their work culture.

Q6: What further skills do you wish you had developed during your postdoctoral training that would have been helpful in your new position?

A: I wish I had been involved in a patent or making something that is useful in clinical settings. It would have been nice to have had more experience working in a team, helped with mentoring students and improved my presentation skills. For industry jobs, they want to know your capability in handling and solving problems and what the application of your research is. Also, I feel it is hard to change my mindset from focusing on publishing high impact papers to focusing on the application of my work. For example, I found CD8+ T cells are expanded in autoimmune uveitis patients, so what can we do about this finding? Is it a biomarker or therapeutic target?

Q7: What do you feel is the difference between research conducted in academia versus industry?

A: In academia, the emphasis is on your scientific skills, especially how to think and design projects. The quality and quantity of your publications are also extremely important. However, industry focuses on your achievements and productivity. They are more concerned about product development than publishing papers in higher impact journals.

Q8: What would be your next goal in career development?

A: Move up inside the company to be a group leader. My long-term goal is to be in charge of a particular branch in the company in the future.

I hope this article is helpful to all the postdoctoral fellows who are interested in a career in industries and have similar interests like Sima in developing useful therapeutics and products for patients.

The contents of this article were approved by Dr. Hirani.

Networking A Special Visiting Fellows Committee Social Event

By Ashley Parker, PhD

On February 5, 2015, the Visiting Fellows Committee (VFC) hosted a social event at Brickside Food & Drink in downtown Bethesda. The social was the first event of the VFC hosted in collaboration with the Division of International Services (DIS). The main idea of the event was to increase the population of international social groups and bridge the interaction with members of DIS and Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE).

A VFC-team led by Ian Yeung and Randi Parks planned a successful event with the assistance of other committee members, bringing more than 40 people together. Arranging the social event with other partner groups allowed the organizations to

reach fellows beyond the regular attendees of VFC events. There were many countries represented, including Nepal, India, France, Brazil, Italy, Germany, Austria, Sweden, China, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Some of the visiting fellows are from countries that have no representation from association groups on campus; thereby this provided an opportunity for these individuals to develop a network with other people from the same country and coordinate the less represented groups with those of larger well-established associations. As a result of this social, the Country Support Groups now boast 26 different countries represented. These are the primary contacts for fellows when arriving at National Institutes of Health (NIH).

In addition to building new relationships, this event was a great opportunity to take advantage of an extended happy hour with specials offered specifically for attendees. In the future, the VFC plans to organize similar socials every quarter (3-4 times per year). Although social events are important to bring visiting fellows together during the year, the VFC host many other events such as the Brown Bag Seminars, Science Voices from Home, and the International Expo which is held every other year. The VFC also prides the organization with making the transition for international fellows easier due to the adaptation to American culture, language, and other aspects of living in a foreign place.

The VFC is excited about hosting future events and they look forward to continuing to build the international community on the NIH campus. The committee is always welcoming new members to bring ideas and suggestions to plan events and programs that are beneficial for visiting fellows. Therefore, it is highly recommended to get involved with VFC activities and expand your network in an effort to have the best experience during your time as a fellow.

1-<https://www.training.nih.gov/felcom/visitingfellows2>

NIH Events

Networking for your Career

A Practical Guide

By Christine C. Jao, PhD

Networking is essential at all career stages, but the path to beginning, and maintaining, successful networking can be challenging. On February 12, 2015, Brad Fackler, the OITE Industry Advisor, presented a seminar on a practical guide to networking.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines networking as “the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business by information exchange.” ManpowerGroup, a world leader in providing employees to companies large and small, found that over 40% of positions were filled through networking within the company. Networking is a skill more often associated with business, but we in the scientific community can also reap the benefits of networking. Networking in academia can aid us in establishing collaborations, receiving invitations to give seminars, and discovering job opportunities.

There are two types of networking: passive and active. Using social media, in particular LinkedIn and Research Gate, is an effective way to stay connected and is an example of passive networking. For passive networking to be successful, it is necessary to keep an up-to-date, complete profile. When you send out an invitation to connect on LinkedIn, especially to someone who you just met, use the opportunity to tell them who you are, how you know each other, and why you'd like to connect.

For most scientists, active networking is the more challenging of the two types. Active networking involves communicating either by phone or in person. To make the most of a networking opportunity, it is best to have a plan. To maximize chances of success, preparation is key. For example, research to determine with whom you would like to make a connection and how to

contact the person. Attending meetings and conferences is a good way to make connections. Joining and participating in professional and alumni societies is also another way to find connections. Use social media, such as LinkedIn, to maintain your connections.

To harness the power of LinkedIn, ask your connections for informational interviews. If you are early in your research career, you can use these as part of your career exploration. These informational interviews can provide you with opportunities to expand your network and also to find out about job openings. Informational interviews can help you obtain background information on the company and the job, which you can use to assemble a strong application. An informational interview is NOT the time to ask for a job.

There are a few important tips to keep in mind for an informational interview. The easiest way to request one is by email. You can conduct the interview by phone or in person, and it should last no more than 30 minutes. It is essential to be fully prepared for the interview. Create and/or update your CV or resume, and bring them with you, especially when you are meeting in person. Prepare your “elevator speech”. The elevator speech should take no more than 90 seconds, and should cover your name, work, specialty or strength, and goals. Be sure you practice it until it becomes second nature. Open the conversation by introducing yourself and briefly explain why you requested the meeting. Summarize your experiences to date, and plan your talking points to keep the conversation flowing. Show your interest in their work by asking questions to make the conversation a 2-way communication. Use open-ended questions to keep the discussion going. According to Mr. Fackler, “the more you make the conversation about them, the more they will remember you.”

To maximize the benefit of informational interviews, cover the following topics: present, past, future, and advice. Ask them about their current position (present), then find out how they got into the field (past), and finally, ask their

opinion about opportunities in their field (future). Ask if they can give you any insights into possible positions. Always ask if there is another person they recommend that you contact. Finally, do not forget to send a follow up thank you note after your informational interview.

To make the most of your career planning at the NIH, make an appointment to meet with one of the OITE counselors. They are available to help with CVs and resumes, as well as interviewing for jobs in academia and industry.

To view a videocast on networking from OITE: (https://www.training.nih.gov/events/view/_2/487/EXPANDING_YOUR_CAREER_NETWORKS)

For more info on how to utilize LinkedIn: (https://www.training.nih.gov/events/view/_2/822/Using_LinkedIn_Effectively_Seventh_in_the_How_to_Series).

NIH Events

Research in India: Challenges and Opportunities

*An Interactive dialogue with
Prof. K. VijayRaghavan*

Varun Sethi MD, PhD

Prof. K. VijayRaghavan, Secretary of India’s Department of Biotechnology (DBT), considered one of India’s most renowned scientists and administrators, had an interactive dialogue with visiting fellows at the NIH on January 16, 2015. India is well represented amongst post-doctoral researchers at NIH and this forum provided fellows with an opportunity to learn and inquire about the evolving canvas of research opportunities back home. Highlighting the impact of US-India collaborations, Prof. VijayRaghavan gave a frank appraisal of challenges and problems and also described the opportunities in a rapidly growing Indian economy.

India faces a unique combination of challenges. On the one hand, it is one of the few countries that has always prioritized higher education, unlike other post-colonial societies. Internationally recognized institutions such as the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) churn out brilliant clinicians, analysts and scientists. At the same time, Indian citizens also face the challenge of having an exponentially increasing young population (<35 years age) with an unmet need for opportunity. Prof. VijayRaghavan further explained the delicate balance of quality and speed in the pursuit of excellence and emphasized that there is an urgent need to create opportunity to match the changing demographic spectrum.

Like anywhere else in the current global economy, funding for science is challenging in India. Support from government, private, and philanthropic sponsors is sought. The prohibitively lengthy process of grant applications and the wide range of disparity amongst applicants remain challenges. He alluded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the recent 102nd Indian Science Congress, calling for efforts to ensure that science, technology and innovation reach the poorest, the remotest and the most vulnerable people. In addition to this impetus he explained that the Indian society has always respected the sciences and academia; and, science and technology remains integral to development in India.

It is expected that increasing the number of researchers through new institutional structures and quality education will boost research in science. The solution lies in building capacity and nurturing world-class institutions. The stress on education, launch of programs such as the Young Investigator program, and promotion of both basic and applied science are steps that are visible and supported on the Indian horizon. Collaborations with international labs and scholarships at graduate, post-doctoral and faculty levels are also being created.

Citing the vaccine action program (VAP) as an example, he elaborated on the success of international collaborations. The VAP program

was designed to combine laboratory-based research, epidemiological studies, field trials, vaccine quality control, and delivery of vaccines. As part of this program, U.S. and Indian scientists carry out collaborative research projects that are directed towards the development of vaccines and allied research interests. The neonatal rotavirus vaccine was the result of a long partnership of more than 20 years and has the potential to save over 100,000 lives a year. Research is a slow process and is crippled with bureaucratic challenges, but such obstacles can be dealt with by efficient decision making and a dynamic evolution of the scientific process.

Prof VijayRaghavan believes that scientific research that is able to link with, and help society will be able to deal with the multifaceted challenges that a complex environment like India brings to the table. Sustainable, simple development projects are needed and scientists need to evolve as entrepreneurs. Encouraging young scientists, he said that outliers of excellence are able to occur only as a result of the median of high quality professionals seen in the subcontinent. Going beyond compartments of basic, translational and clinical science, he described science as being only either good or bad. He stressed the importance of doing good work, wherever the opportunity is in keeping with your expertise.

In response to some questions from the audience, he highlighted the current focus of human biology programs involved in fetal and early child development amongst others. Collaborations for cancer research and infrastructure to deal with big data analysis was also discussed. In response to queries regarding the MD-PhD path in India, he explained that the increased demand of practicing clinicians together with the absence of a research plus clinical career path, has not allowed such a project to amplify. However, he remains optimistic that India is responsive to the changing demands and available proficiency; and, continues to believe in investing in science and education.

As a perfect culmination to an enriching dialogue, the audience was able to savor a delicious Indian meal. Had it not been for the cold winds, the buzz

of Hindi, the delicious food and all the science talk just might have made you believe that you were in fact in India.

The contents of this article were approved by Professor VijayRaghavan.

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Looking for Leadership Opportunities?

Join the NIH Visiting Fellows Committee (VFC), an organization that is:

- dedicated to building community amongst the NIH's diverse fellow population;
- committed to bringing career building resources and events to the fellows of the NIH;

Become a voice regarding issues of importance to visiting fellows.

Help your career as you help your colleagues.

Contact any of the Visiting Fellows Committee officers below to find out about being a part of the VFC.

WE ARE ON THE WEB

<https://www.training.nih.gov/felcom/visitingfellows2>