

National Institutes of Health



Visiting Fellows Committee

NIH VFC Newsletter 2013 Winter Edition

Contributing to global science development by building careers

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Culture Corner

The NIH-Bethesda Campus is Born

A Brief History

By Amie D. Moody, PhD

The early days of what would become the National Institutes of Health were quite modest. In 1887, a young physician, Joseph J. Kinyoun, was appointed by the US government to run a single-room laboratory on Staten Island in New York. The purpose of this laboratory was to develop methods of disease detection—the main causes for concern of the day being cholera and yellow fever. The laboratory moved to Washington DC in 1891, and for ten years Dr. Kinyoun was the sole occupant of the facility. Eventually the laboratory grew, and in 1901 Congress authorized \$35,000 for the construction of a new building that would investigate diseases relevant to public health.

This laboratory came to be known as the Hygienic Laboratory. As the size of the laboratory grew to fill the new building, so too did the mission. Now all diseases and regulation of treatment were studied. The Hygienic Laboratory remained a part of the US Public Health Service (PHS), and shared the agency's budget. Then, in 1931 Senator Joseph E. Ransdell introduced a bill proposing that the Hygienic Laboratory change its name to the National Institute of Health (there was only one Institute in the beginning). Furthermore, he proposed that the new NIH should have its own \$15 million budget. The senator realized that the US science was falling behind the rest of the world, and that the cause was lack of sufficient funding. Congress granted the name change and funds for a second building. However, the world was in the midst of the Great Depression, so the NIH only maintained a modest budget of \$43,000.

The NIH quickly grew, and by 1934 the lack of space was a problem. Finding adequate space to

house the research animals was particularly problematic. Thus, the search began for an animal farm outside of Washington, DC. As luck would have it, one of the affluent families that lived along Rockville Pike in Bethesda owned a sizable estate. Luke I. Wilson and his wife Helen tried to build a legacy by donating a portion of their sizable property to various causes. However, the Great Depression caused these plans to fall through.

Frustrated, Mr. Wilson wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt offering the donation to the federal government. President Roosevelt circulated the offer through the federal agencies. Of all the agencies, only Dr. Lewis R. Thompson actually visited the Wilson's property. Although Dr. Lewis was the chief of PHS's Division of Scientific Research, and not an affiliate of the NIH, he became the champion for the NIH establishing a presence in Bethesda. It was Dr. Lewis who developed the idea that the 45 acres the Wilsons donated could become the home of the entire NIH, not just the animal farm. With the space, the NIH could grow into a state of art research facility, and remain so for years to come.

Not everyone shared his vision, not even then-director of the NIH, Dr. George McCoy. Dr. McCoy felt that with a new animal farm, the NIH was large enough. He knew all of the scientists and their research, and did not want to lose that familiarity. Ultimately, Dr. Thompson was able to use his influence to ensure that the NIH moved to Bethesda. In 1937, barely starting to recover from the Great Depression, Congress released the necessary funds, almost \$1.4 million, for construction of the new NIH campus.

Ground breaking occurred in January of 1938 for the construction of six new buildings—Buildings 1-6. As the buildings were completed, scientists moved into their new “homes.” Building 1 became the Administration Building, and was completed by December of 1938. Building 2 housed the first laboratories in the country that focused solely on studying industrial hygiene. Buildings 3 and 4



This aerial view of the newly completed first six buildings was taken in 1940. Building 1 is in the center, surrounded by Buildings 2-4. Building 6 is off to the lower right. Photograph from the Office of NIH History, Collections Database.

contained various research divisions, and Building 6 housed the newly established National Cancer Institute.

President Roosevelt dedicated the campus on October 31, 1940. It was a period when World War II was escalating in Europe, and though the US was preparing its military, it had not yet entered the war. The dedication of the NIH provided an opportunity for the president to show the American public that even as the country prepared for the possibility of war, the advancement of knowledge and public health was equally important. The mission of the NIH only continued to grow. In 1948, the name officially changed to the National Institutes of Health, acknowledging the new institutes that studied mental health and dental and heart diseases. Today the NIH is comprised of 27 Institutes and Centers, and almost countless contributions to the scientific community have been made by both intra- and extramural NIH scientists.

For more information about the history of the NIH, please visit the Office of History website: <http://history.nih.gov/>. In addition to history, the website describes the various exhibits that are both virtual and on the NIH grounds. Below are the other references used for this article.

Lyons, Michele. *70 Acres of Science The NIH Moves to Bethesda*. Office of NIH History, NIH, 2006.

Morens, D. A. and Fauci, A. S. "The Forgotten Forefather: Joseph James Kinyoun and the Founding of the National Institutes of Health." *mBio* 3 (2012): e00139-12.

"NIH marks 125th anniversary with tribute to founder Dr. Joseph J. Kinyoun," from the Fogarty International Center at the NIH. <http://www.fic.nih.gov/News/GlobalHealthMatters/july-august-2012/Pages/nih-anniversary-joseph-kinyoun.aspx>

Science Voices from Home Funding for Research in Germany

By Hui Geng, PhD

Have you ever been curious about research and funding opportunities in Germany? As a leader in investing in and developing scientific research, Germany provides numerous work, funding and collaborative opportunities for scientists in Germany and abroad. On September 30, 2013, the Visiting Fellows Committee's Science Voices from Home program invited Dr. Max Voegler, director of the North American office of the German Research Foundation (DFG), and Ms. Bettina Schuffert, DFG's contact in the North American office, to discuss abundant opportunities for funding and research in Germany.

Dr. Voegler started the seminar with briefly introducing DFG as, "the largest, self-governing funding organization for basic research in Germany and Europe." This organization is directed by its own elected statutory bodies and its activities are managed on a day-to-day level by its head office. The mission of DFG is to promote and fund the advancement of all scientific fields and the humanities. As a member of several international scientific and science policy associations, DFG actively facilitates international cooperation, and supports knowledge transfer between science and industry. DFG has put

continued support into the life sciences; in 2012, 38.6% of DFG's grants were allocated to funding the life sciences. To gather expertise from universities, hospitals, and institutes in a certain region, the German government has invested in six German Centers for Health Research in cardiovascular, infectious, lung, neurodegenerative diseases, translational cancer research, and diabetes. These research centers are distributed throughout the country, and receive over \$270 million (US dollars) each year.

Ms. Schuffert spoke about the career stages and various DFG programs that include funded research positions. Unlike the tenure-track career model in the US, one is eligible for submitting a DFG proposal just after obtaining his/her PhD degree. Several thousand positions are available for early-career researchers on DFG-funded projects. Postdoctoral researchers are eligible for the Temporary Positions for Principal Investigators; junior researchers may apply for Emmy Noether positions; and the Heisenberg Program caters to experienced researchers. Also different from the many American granting agencies, these programs do not have application deadlines. Interested researchers can use Research Explore (interactive map of German research landscape) and GEPRIS (online database on current DFG-funded projects) to find relevant projects and institutions.

The temporary PI positions provide opportunities for scientists to focus on their proposed research projects. A doctorate degree, a host research institute in Germany or a German research institute abroad, and a good project are all you need to submit a proposal. Grants for such position are up to three years, and include an annual salary of \$64,000, consumables and travel expenses.

The goals of the Emmy Noether Program are two-fold. The first is to help young researchers gain independence and teaching experience. The second is to promote international research by limiting the eligible candidates to researchers who have at least 12 months of research experience outside of Germany. This program also requires that a scientist has worked as a postdoctoral researcher

for two to four years. Each year, 50-60 candidates are awarded this five-year grant that comprises a \$70,000 annual salary, plus the cost of equipment and travel. Of these candidates, 70-80% of them have successfully transitioned into a professorship.

The Heisenberg Program aims to support outstanding researchers that qualify for professorship but do not yet have tenure. There are two awarded levels, Heisenberg Fellowship, which is equivalent to assistant or associate professor level, and Heisenberg Professorship, which equals associate or full professor level. The funding for both positions is up to five years, with a starting annual salary of \$72,000, plus additional allowances for a temporary professorship at the W2/W3 level (associate/full professor level in German academia system). The main criteria of a Heisenberg professorship is that the eligible candidate must find a position at a German university that guarantees to fund this position after DFG's grant expires.

Additionally, DFG supports international cooperation through travel allowances, students/scientist exchanges, and providing funds for organizations to invite guest researchers. Three special programs are designed for the international collaboration: grants for the initiation of international cooperation, joint calls for proposals with partner organizations and international research training groups (IRTGs). Researchers can apply through the German host institution to fund a trip abroad, to learn a new technique for example. Or a researcher can apply for funds for a foreign sabbatical up to 12 months, which may be divided into three-month blocks. Finally, for the joint supervision and exchange doctoral program, the application requires a joint submission from both faculty members at German universities and their foreign counterparts. Foreign partners are expected to obtain complementary funding from their own sources.

For more information about these exciting opportunities in Germany, please visit http://www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/head_office/dfg_abroad/north_america/index.html. If you are interested in preparing a DFG proposal, please

visit the DFG website at http://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/dfg_im_profil/ge_schaefsstelle/publikationen/building_links_academic_rig_2013.pdf. Do not forget to label your proposal as “First-time proposal.” Good luck, everyone!

Where are they now? Transitioning From the NIH

An Interview with Dr. Vatsalya

By Amie D. Moody, PhD

A common question of visiting fellows is how to handle the transition from being a postdoctoral fellow to a full-time employee. I recently had the opportunity to ask Dr. Vatsalya about his background and the path he followed to obtain his current position.



Former NIH visiting fellow, Dr. Vatsalya discusses his transition into a new career.

Dr. Vatsalya recently completed his training at the NIH as a postdoctoral fellow with a clinical focus for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). He is now a lead clinical investigator at the Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute at the University of Louisville Medical

Center in Louisville, KY.

In India, Dr. Vatsalya was selected to study abroad through the All India Medical Entrance Exam Pathway. He traveled to Luxemburg and Odessa to complete coursework for his MD. After a final year of clinical training at Delhi University, back in India, Dr. Vatsalya received his MD, specializing in internal medicine. While still in India, he wrote a dissertation in geriatric oncology, the equivalent of a PhD, at Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. After moving to the United

States, Dr. Vatsalya continued his education — completing a professional graduate program in clinical psychology, with a joint internship at two schools in the University of Georgia system, and a dissertation, “Work longevity markers and their association in delay of onset of mental disorders,” from American University in Washington, DC.

While working on his dissertation, Dr. Vatsalya came to the NIH to gain experience conducting large scale clinical studies. He said, “it is hard to find another place where such large scale clinical trials are performed with the availability of extensive resources and expertise [of the NIH].” While a fellow with NIAAA, Dr. Vatsalya worked on clinical trials that focused on understanding alcohol addiction. Projects in which he participated included studies with varenicline and quetiapine, investigations of HIV and hepatitis C virus comorbid patients’ symptomology pathways, studies of genetic expression during acute alcohol intake, and the development of biomarkers in an alcohol-dependent population. Although he has a new position, Dr. Vatsalya still collaborates with his previous laboratory and serves as an *ad hoc* extramural grant evaluator for NIAAA.

In his new role as lead clinical investigator, Dr. Vatsalya supervises several large scale clinical research programs and coordinates the extramural funding for these programs. A large portion of Dr. Vatsalya’s efforts will go to pursuing funding mechanisms like U01 (funds a research project cooperative agreement) and P20 (funds the creation or expansion of interdisciplinary programs that address a specific issue, e.g. the Renewal of Centers of Biomedical Research Excellence) grants. Obtaining extramural funding is a key component of achieving tenure at academic institutions. Dr. Vatsalya says that the NIH was a “sanctuary for learning” while he was a trainee. Yet, he enjoys a sense of direct authority now that he did not have as a trainee. The trade-off, however, is that there is less room for error.

Dr. Vatsalya advises NIH trainees to take advantage of as many opportunities as possible, beginning from day one. During his own training, Dr. Vatsalya polished his research, administrative

and teaching skills. He states that, “[in] my experience, publication and competency in leading critical studies maximized my [chances for success].” He also understood that publishing alone is not sufficient for success. Faculty positions are difficult to obtain, and therefore building a successful funding track record is imperative. Because successful extramural investigators are constantly writing, refining and submitting grants, Dr. Vatsalya developed the habit of spending half an hour to an hour every night working on grant writing.

I asked Dr. Vatsalya to discuss something particularly difficult or surprising about the transition to his new position. He replied that, “my immigration status was the biggest obstacle in my transition, not the job search. It was difficult, unpredictable at every stage, and time-[consuming] to accomplish the transition.” He suggests that visiting fellows should begin prioritizing their future goals during the second year of their postdoctoral training. If a fellow decides that he/she would like to continue their career in the US, then demonstrating long-term stability (i.e. permanent residence for visiting fellows) is important for future funding applications. Although a department that offers a faculty position may wait for a fellow to establish long-term immigration status, there is only a thin margin for error. Ultimately, postdoctoral fellows should focus on writing grants and developing professional networks starting in their third and fourth years, and not be distracted by immigration issues.

Finally, Dr. Vatsalya is happy that, in addition to his successful career at the NIH, he did not neglect other important aspects of his life. He is also a successful husband, father and son. Professionally, the recurring theme of his career has been hard work and getting an early start planning for the next step.

Culture Corner Celebrating India’s Independence Day

By Amie D. Moody, PhD, and
Ravikiran Yedidi, PhD

After nearly 100 years of British rule, India was granted independence on August 15, 1947. This year marked the 67th anniversary of independence. Typically, people gather to celebrate Independence Day by hoisting the Indian flag. This is followed by the Indian national anthem, food, cultural events, and traditional dances. A team of seven Indian researchers at the NIH, Drs. Tejpratap Singh (NIAID), Samarth Chandra (NIMH), Srujana Kola (NCI), Ravi Yedidi (NCI), Nishant Mohan (FDA), Gokhul Kilaru (NIAID) and Abhilash Venugopalan (NCI), pictured below, formed a committee and organized a pot-luck lunch to celebrate the occasion. More than 20 researchers of Indian origin and their families attended this gathering on August 17 in Building 10 on the NIH-Bethesda campus.

Following the tradition, the committee selected a chief guest for the gathering. This is a guest of honor responsible for hoisting the Indian flag at



The Chief Guest, Tia, being held by Dr. Ravi Yedidi, next to her father, Dr. Tejpratap Singh, stand in front of the Indian flag after the hoisting ceremony.

the beginning of the event. The chief guest for this year’s celebration was Miss Tia Singh, the one-year-old daughter of Dr. Tejpratap Singh!

With the flag hoisted, the festivities began. For lunch, the cuisine of 12 Indian regions was represented! During the event, attendees were treated to the vocal talents of Dr. Nishi Sharma (NCI), a gifted singer. Dr. Sharma sang patriotic songs and several ghazals, a form of poetry that

has existed for centuries. In between the ghazals, Dr. Tejpratap Singh treated the audience to amusing poetry that he wrote. One such poem, about the life of a graduate student who was excited about some experimental results, but later found that the p-value was a nightmare, earned him an encore.

Dr. Kilaru expressed the sentiment about this event: “‘Unity in Diversity’ has been and will be the theme of India. I am proud to witness the same spirit reflected in the 67th Independence Day celebrations held at the NIH.” Along similar lines, Dr. Mohan was happy to have been a part of the organizing committee celebrating India’s Independence Day with fellow NIH Indians, and to honor the people who worked and struggled to regain independence for India. Dr. Yedidi added, “Once again, I am very happy to see a cultural get-together. It was my pleasure to honor the chief guest, Miss Tia Singh, and I thank the organizing



Organizing committee for this year’s Indian Independence celebration, from left to right: Drs. Tejpratap Singh, Samarth Chandra, Srujana Kola, Ravi Yedidi, Nishant Mohan, Gokhul Kilaru, Abhilash Venugopalan.

committee for a job well done.

My special thanks go to Dr. Nishiraj Sharma for an outstanding singing performance and Dr. Tejpratap Singh for an excellent poetic-comedy at this event and I highly appreciate their creativity. I hope to see more of such events in the future.”

So, even if you missed this year’s celebration, you can look forward to a similar celebration occurring next year! Please contact Dr. Sandip De (sandip.de@nih.gov) to join the NIH-INDIA Google group and receive emails about future events. For further information regarding the contents of this article, please contact Dr. Yedidi (yedidirs@helix.nih.gov). Finally, please visit www.nihindia.com to connect with the Indian community at the NIH.

Visiting Fellow’s Life A Seven-Year Old Girl’s Halloween *Candies, Costumes, and Pumpkins*

By Ping Chen, MD-PhD

“What is your favorite holiday?” I asked my daughter.

“Halloween!” she said.

She discovered Halloween only two years ago but it soon became her favorite holiday. Why? The answer is apparent: candies, costumes, and pumpkins! That is the Halloween she understands.

Candies are her most favorite things. She remembered she got a big bag of candies on Halloween night last year, so she prepared her pumpkin-shaped basket for candies this year. She and her friends went to neighbors and knocked on the doors, saying “trick or treat?” I observed that adults never really answered the question, and just distributed candies with friendly smiles. Sometimes, adults asked kids to pick up candies by themselves. Interestingly, every kid picked just one each time, so they seemed honest. All parents with a big empty bag in their hands were standing behind the kids and supported their brave behaviors. Those bags were for all the candies!

I saw my daughter and her friends run from door to door all night. They were full of energy. I was so surprised at my daughter’s sustained running when I was already exhausted. I was also surprised that she was so brave to talk to people she does not know. I know she never talks to unfamiliar people. But that night, she was brave and open! I am sure that is driven by her favorite candies. After Halloween, a challenging problem I have to face is that she keeps asking to eat candies every day. Then we have to set up a rule that she can eat only two candies each day. But she still argues with me to have one more candy for different reasons, such as doing a very good job, or finishing homework very quickly. She never stops asking for candies!

The chance to eat candies is one reason she likes Halloween so much.

The second reason she likes Halloween is for her brand new fairy costume. For Halloween last year, she did not really have a costume; I only bought her a princess wand and a princess crown. She was very happy with that. However, one month before Halloween this year, she kept asking to have a store-bought “real” costume. She told me that everyone at school had a costume and that she wanted a fairy costume. Several days later, I bought her one and she was so excited that she even wore it at home before Halloween.

My daughter’s third favorite part of Halloween is going to the farm to pick up a pumpkin. This is a trip organized by her school. Every year, I remember with how much excitement she brings back a pumpkin - and some hay in her hair and shoes! Unfortunately, I am not allowed to do anything with the pumpkin because it is hers. The pumpkin just sits at home until it starts rotting and has to be thrown away. This whole pumpkin adventure is her third reason for the favorite Halloween holiday.

Without any doubt, Halloween has serious origins and a long history. For my daughter, she enjoys it because there is so much fun. As a mother, I enjoy seeing my daughter having fun “trick or treating”. And now my daughter is asking me: “Mom, can I have a new costume for Halloween next year?”

Upcoming Event

Tax seminars organized by the Division of International Services

January 21, 2014, 11am-1pm,
Bodg 31/6C Room 10

For additional dates, please visit
<http://dis.ors.od.nih.gov/DISInfo/taxseminar.pdf>

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Looking for Leadership Opportunities?

Be a part of an organization that is:

- dedicated to building community amongst NIH's diverse fellow population;
- committed to helping bring career building resources and events;

Be a voice regarding issues that are 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.

National Institutes of Health Visiting Fellows Committee

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WE ARE ON THE WEB

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