

Annual Luncheon Discussion

Jumpstarting Your Academic Career

By Preeti Dalawari, MD, MPSH

We've been taught that the best way to get from point A to point B is with a straight line. If only an academic medicine career trajectory could be that simple! Our diverse roundtable members of Drs. Megan Ranney, Keme Carter, Aislinn Black, and myself discussed some key points to help jump-start an academic career.

Consider a Fellowship

While many newly graduating residents are ready to be done with training and to start earning immediately, there is something to be said for delayed gratification. A lot of attention has been devoted to finding mentors, sponsors, and developing networking skills recently (i.e.- courtesy of *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg). Doing a fellowship enables you to develop a specific skill set, while guaranteeing a mentor and protected time to pursue discipline specific interests. It will spark your creative interests and travel with you to your academic position.

Mentorship

A mentor can be defined as an experienced and trusted advisor; someone to guide you in the right direction. What we must understand is that the driving force in the mentor-mentee relationship must be the mentee. No one has more vested interest in your professional career than you, not even your mentor. When meeting with a mentor, have a specific agenda you would like to discuss, remember to schedule the next meeting time. Your first meeting should define goals and expectations that each of you will be able to commit to for the relationship, but be flexible enough for these to evolve over time. Sometimes, you may have to look outside of your division/department, or even institution to find mentors. These relationships do not have to be a formal process and you may not find a "one mentor fits all" person. Most likely an individual will have multiple mentors for different aspects, as needed: research, personal, clinical, teaching, for example. When looking for a mentor, good questions to ask are the three things he/she would do differently in their career/research (or whatever the need) and three things to be successful in the career/research.

The "Yes" Factor

Early in your career, it may be beneficial to say "yes" to projects more often. While the expectations of clinical shifts and non clinical duties can become overwhelming, saying "no" one too many times will shut the door for growth and opportunity. Saying "yes" to these committee meeting or QI projects may lead you to your niche and help in networking and collaborating on other projects. As your career progresses, you will be able to choose projects that fit your niche and expertise and can be more selective.

Figure out a way to "buy down time"

At some point, you may need to think about how you can obtain protected time. Early on in your career, you may not have leverage to do this, and likely will need a product first (i.e- innovative project implantation, or preliminary results from a research focus). As you develop the product, consider applying for funding within or outside of your institution. Or think of other ways you can get some more time: Are you a night owl? Would you be able to procure a more stable clinical schedule or reduced time if you did night shift work only? Brainstorm and be creative in assessing how to get the time you need to be productive.

While the above points are by no means all inclusive, it is a starting point for those early in their career. Of note, there are many insightful documents and resources online, such as:

1. SAEM web link:
<http://issuu.com/saemonline/docs/emergency-medicine-academic-career-guide>
2. Group on Women in Science (GWIMS) of the AAMC
<https://www.aamc.org/members/gwims/>
3. Local or regional faculty development workshops such as ACEP teaching or research fellowship opportunities
<http://www.acep.org/meetings/>



**We are not creatures of circumstance;
we are creators of circumstance.**

-- Benjamin Disraeli