

Lunch and Learn 10/11/18 Biomedical Careers in Industry

Panelists: Laura Sittig—Senior Medical writer and project manager, IHC; Elizabeth Bagley—Medical Science Liaison, Genomic Health; Yuan Ji—Medical Director, ARUP; Nicole Monroe—Scientist in clinical affairs, BioFire Diagnostics

Why did you choose industry?

LS: The decision to move to industry was a lifestyle choice, with better work life balance.

YJ: Good job market with a relatively secured job and reasonable salary and life-work balance. You don't feel like you wasted a 14-hour day like you often can in academia.

NM: Working in a startup can be stressful, but it's more predictable with shorter timelines, you can see progress.

Are there problems with non-compete agreements?

EB: Non-compete agreements are negotiable, and skills travel. She was working on breast and ovarian cancer at Myriad, which was competitive with Genomic Health, so she works in the neuro division with prostate cancer now.

How do you begin a career in industry?

LS: Play up what experience you do have; recast experiences as relevant to a particular position. "You have more power and experience than you think you do". Ignore the qualifications and apply anyway because requirements are soft. Shift away from being afraid, find what you want to do and do it. Think broadly and creatively about possibilities.

YJ: Apply for the "Lab Genomics and Genetics" (LGG) or ABMGG fellowship. This is 3 years of training that leads to board certification and the promise of a job afterward, even without an MD. Start to build your LinkedIn profile. Never stop writing grants and manuscripts, as a way to enrich your CV and building skills while waiting for the opportunities opened up. It helps to know someone inside the company but isn't necessary. Apply by official channels, and if possible, find out who the recruiter is and get in touch with them in person. Be ready for opportunities and play your strengths. Law of attraction: if you keep thinking about what you want it will happen.

NM: Scientist I or level 1 type positions are usually appropriate for recent postdocs. If you don't have industry experience, just say why you are qualified. Having a job at ARUP helped her get the job at BioFire. Apply on the website and give your resume to someone you know. Remember your skills.

EB: It is difficult to break into MSL jobs. She began in industry at Myriad, moved to associate product manager, and was groomed in the company for when the MSL job became available. It's helpful if you know someone in the company that can flag your resume, especially if you don't have experience. Once you are in industry, you're set. Package and present experience for your postdoc and show you can handle aspects of the job. Remember you are qualified, put yourself out there.

What do you do at your job?

LS: Project manager side goes back and forth with clinical teams, being the point person and team lead. Works with clinical teams across IHC, meets with subject matter experts, then gets at the major points and explains them to other people. Patient information writing so patients can learn about their conditions. Health literacy, writing for any audience, is a key aspect of her job.

NM: Supervise research associates, write protocols, manage studies, hire people, engage in a formal mentoring relationship with research associates, prepare for trials, during the trials run samples, after trial report writing. Data analysis, meetings. BioFire does publish, but she does not.

EB: Fly to meetings: just recently flew to Oklahoma for a 1-hour meeting. Discusses scientific rationale for assays/products. Get key opinion leaders (KOL) to become advocates for a product. Education and KOL development. At Myriad, worked more with product development. Just deals with the science, less with bioinformatics and legal. Involved in studies, R&D, and testing of tests. She does not feel like a salesperson because there is good separation between sales and MSL. In pharma companies, there is a firewall, and there is no communication with sales. In diagnostics, it isn't as big of a deal as pharma, but still separate from the sales division.

YJ: Job is meant to be 80% clinical 20% education and administration but ends up being mostly clinical and a lot of additional hours and effort for things outside of clinical. Signs out diagnostic test results, work with RD scientists for assay development, help clinical lab troubleshooting, oversees 4 laboratories, projects, propose new projects to be launched, mentor pathology residents at university and fellows of the fellowship. ½ day at university for committees like admissions for medical school. Deals with real cases and real patient results, and deep involvement in education so it is never boring.

Does doing a postdoc make you more or less competitive for an industry job?

YJ: A long postdoc can lead to a lot of experience gained. Productivity and motivation are more important than years. You don't lose anything by applying for a position. Don't limit yourself. In contrast to more experienced people, new people are viewed as having more passion and motivation, which makes them more appealing for some position. Mid-career people sometimes can get judged too.

NM: Postdoc experience adds additional skills, but it doesn't hurt you unless you did a very long (~8 years) postdoc without publishing or having something to show for it. When looking for a scientist, it doesn't matter if you did a postdoc, more that you understand what the company needs, and you have those skills.

Do your companies sponsor visas?

NM: BioFire usually does not

YJ: Fellowship training is open to foreigners, but it is very competitive. Find more information about the University of Utah LGG fellowship at

<https://medicine.utah.edu/pathology/fellowships/laboratory-genetics-genomics/>; and additional

fellowship through ABMGG website: <http://abmgg.org/>. There are also clinical fellowships in microbiology, chemistry, and even clinical physics available for other areas outside of genetics.