AuPS/ASB Meeting - Newcastle 2007

Student symposium: Life after a PhD

Monday 3 December 2007 – Hunter Room

Chair: Enzo Porrello

Establishing a career in science: the early postdoctoral years

M.J. Watt, St Vincent's Institute, 9 Princes St, Fitzroy, VIC 3065, Australia.

So you are midway through your PhD and are (hopefully) thinking about the direction of your scientific career. Just like a game of Snakes and Ladders, there are moves that can fast-track your scientific development and others that can impede your productivity. There are many options and considerations when deciding your next step(s). Some of the major questions that may confront you and require some considerations include (but not limited to):

- Finding a supervisor. This is where you first decide what you want to do scientifically and then use the knowledge of you PhD supervisor and colleagues to find an appropriate lab and make contact with the proposed supervisor.
- The location of the fellowship. One must weigh up the benefits of staying in the current laboratory or moving to another lab. For example, is a move overseas essential for future success in the scientific landscape?
- Determining where to obtain funding for fellowship support. This may be from major granting bodies such as the NHMRC and ARC to specialist agencies.
- Finding an appropriate laboratory. One must consider the benefits of a larger well resourced lab versus a small lab with less funds. Another vital consideration is the potential 'access' to the proposed supervisor and the mentorship that you will receive.

After finding your lab and settling into post-doc life there are new challenges and considerations. These include when to broaden your horizons and move on, how to gain independence without negatively influencing your relationship with your current supervisor, to be aware of funding pitfalls (e.g. rules pertaining to the new investigator grants with the NHMRC) and finally, how to establish collaborations. Being aware of these issues and addressing them are important as you move from PhD to post-doc and beyond!

Life after the Ph.D.: applying for jobs and establishing your career

G.S. Lynch, Basic and Clinical Myology Laboratory, Department of Physiology, The University of Melbourne, VIC 3010, Australia.

While training for a Ph.D., much of your focus is rightly placed on your laboratory research and your writing skills become honed for the specific purpose of completing a thesis and publishing scientific papers. But there are other aspects to your career development that are perhaps often neglected, despite being some of the most important skills you are likely to have – namely, knowing how to write job applications and knowing how best to prepare for job interviews so as to secure your career in research.

Understanding how best to prepare your *Curriculum Vitae* and cover letter for your prospective employer will optimise your chances of being short-listed for interview. There are also important things to consider when choosing a laboratory, addressing selection criteria for advertised positions, and selecting appropriate referees that will provide a fair and balanced assessment of your capabilities.

If short-listed, there are some important do's and don'ts when it comes to preparing for interview. Most importantly, do your homework on the laboratory of choice and identify what skills you can bring to the group as well as how that group can help you meet your goals. If research is your passion and you are keen on pursuing a research career, goal setting will be important for your future success.

Personal and professional goals are not 'one size fits all' but unique and individual journeys. Regardless, there are some general principles that can help in setting short- and long-term goals that are realistic and achievable. High on the list should be a clear plan for productive research and a realisation of your research independence. This could involve ultimately leading your own laboratory or being a key researcher in a larger team. Despite its ups and downs, a career in research and education can be highly rewarding and, most of all, enjoyable!