

The NICHD Connection

January 2019

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Thoughts of a Postbac: Focusing on Self-Care and Wellness

By *Leana Ramos*

Stress is a part of life. As postbacs, we all experience some form of stress whether it is due to work, adjusting to a new lab, contemplating career goals, completing graduate/professional school applications, or balancing work and personal life. Recently, I came across an article published in *Nature Biotechnology* showing that many trainees continue to experience stress-associated symptoms, such as depression and anxiety, as they further their education.¹ From reading the article, I was surprised to find out that “43-46% of [surveyed UC Berkeley] graduate students in biological sciences, physical sciences, and engineering” reported feeling depressed,² while a majority of doctoral students at the University of Arizona reported stress.³ Thankfully, at the NIH, trainees are not alone. The supportive staff of the NIH Office of Intramural Training & Education (OITE) provides numerous resources to help us cope with stress and focus on our wellbeing now and in the future.

I have personally found OITE workshops and activities incredibly helpful, so I wanted to share several opportunities with you here. There are two wellness workshops held quarterly: “Tune In & Take Care: Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing” and “Becoming a Resilient Scientist.” OITE also provides several wellness-oriented groups on a weekly basis, including the “Mindfulness Meditation” group (Tuesdays at noon and Thursdays at 5 p.m.), “Stress and Resilience” discussion groups (Tuesday afternoons), and “Wellness Wednesdays” (12 noon—feel free to bring your lunch!). All of these groups offer ways to manage stress, build resilience, and learn strategies for holistic self-care. Finally, OITE hosts monthly “Wellness Events,” which involve fun activities that help build community at the NIH. Last year, November’s Wellness Event was “Having Fun with Zumba” and December’s event was the OITE Holiday Party.

Dr. Michael Sheridan, OITE Special Advisor for Diversity and Wellness Programs, shares two general messages with the postbac community: practice self-care and have a mindful work ethic. She emphasizes, “To do well, one has to be well.”

Thoughts of a

Postbac

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Letter from the Editor

The topic of mental health is popping up everywhere. No matter where you look—Twitter feeds, mommy blogs, Instagram, and even science career websites—the concept of mind and body wellness is center stage. And rightfully so. No one is completely immune to the pressures of life. We've all been there. When your friend asks casually "How's it going?" and your response is something along the lines of "It's been one of those days." But what if "one of those days" turns into one of those weeks or even months. At that point, it could be time to call in some support.

In this first issue of the year, and throughout 2019, we will publish several articles on mental health and related activities at the NIH. It's an important topic, one we should not confine to a single issue of the newsletter. We begin with a [list of resources](#) from the NICHD Office of Education as well as NIH-wide programs. In our "[Thoughts of a Postbac](#)" column, Leana Ramos focuses on the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) offerings, many of which apply not only to postbacs but also to the wider NIH trainee population.

Now it's time to grab your calendar, because this month's [announcements](#) and [events](#) are loaded with several great workshops, seminars, and career development opportunities. In particular, take note of the 2019 Three-minute-Talk (TmT) announcement on [page 9](#). The TmT competition is a wonderful way to gain valuable oral communication skills and showcase your research on campus.

On behalf of *The NICHD Connection*, I wish everyone a happy and healthy new year. Here's to another 12 months of keeping NICHD fellows connected!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Please send any questions, comments, or ideas to our editor at Shana.Spindler@gmail.com.

Thoughts of a Postbac: Focusing on Self-Care and Wellness

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According to Dr. Sheridan, research shows that people are most productive when they take self-care seriously. Dr. Sheridan also shares the importance of having a mindful work ethic. She encourages postbacs to take a healthy and holistic approach to balancing their work and personal life. She compares life to a circle with work as just a part of that circle. In addition to work, it is important to dedicate time to family, friends, hobbies, and other interests.

In the process of applying to graduate/professional schools and jobs, postbacs may feel particularly stressed. During the application process, Dr. Sheridan advises to delineate what you can control and what you cannot control, and then focus on what you can control and be proactive. Dr. Sheridan also suggests that postbacs take advantage of their resources—reach out to their mentors and postbac community, review application tips on the OITE blog, and participate in the various OITE career-related activities, such as mock interviews and getting help with applications (she urges postbacs to reach out *early* in the application process!). Finally, Dr. Sheridan encourages postbacs to read their emails daily to stay tuned to all of the great resources that OITE offers. She reminds us that “practicing self-care and promoting well-being is important to be successful and happy in life,” and OITE is here to help!

The *Nature Biotechnology* article suggests that even though a high number of trainees report experiencing significant stress, practicing strategies that promote mental health and general wellbeing can be significantly beneficial in addressing this problem. Although it may sound easier said than done for many postbacs, it is important to maintain work-life balance. As NIH postbacs, we are fortunate to have so many opportunities to learn self-care strategies to live healthier and happier.

Special acknowledgments to Drs. Michael Sheridan and Sharon Milgram for sharing NIH OITE wellness opportunities.

REFERENCES:

1. Evans TM et al. (2018). “Evidence for a Mental Health Crisis in Graduate Education.” *Nature Biotechnology* 36, 282-284.
2. UC Berkeley Graduate Assembly. (2014). *Graduate Student Happiness and Well-being Report*. Accessed Online: <http://ga.berkeley.edu/wellbeingreport/>.
3. Smith E, and Brooks Z. (2015). “Graduate Student Mental Health.” NAGPS Institute. Accessed Online: http://nagps.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NAGPS_Institute_mental_health_survey_report_2015.pdf.



A New Year, A New You: A Focus on Mental Wellbeing

The NICHD Office of Education strives to help fellows succeed not only in their research and chosen career paths, but also in fellows' overall life satisfaction. That's why we're kicking off the first issue of the new year with a focus on the most important aspect of our trainee community: your personal health and wellbeing, of which mental health is a critical component. Over the next few pages, you will find valuable resources available to you as NIH fellows. Please consider if you could benefit from any of the listed opportunities.

NICHD OFFICE OF EDUCATION RESOURCES

Fellows make appointments with the NICHD Office of Education for a wide range of reasons. Since 2017, the office has held over 600 individual meetings with fellows. Professional school advice, career guidance, and grant writing support represent about 75 percent of appointments with the office. But other appointment topics include mentoring challenges in the lab, event planning for professional development activities, and orientation sessions (see pie chart, n=600).

The NICHD Office of Education is a great first stop if you have encountered a challenge with your training, especially if that challenge is causing mental angst or a decrease in your overall wellbeing. Please always feel free to reach out to Drs. Yvette Pittman or Erin Walsh if you need to talk, information below:

Yvette Pittman, PhD

Director, Office of Education

Phone: 301-496-3014

Email: yvette.pittman@nih.gov

Erin Walsh, PhD

Program Manager, Office of Education

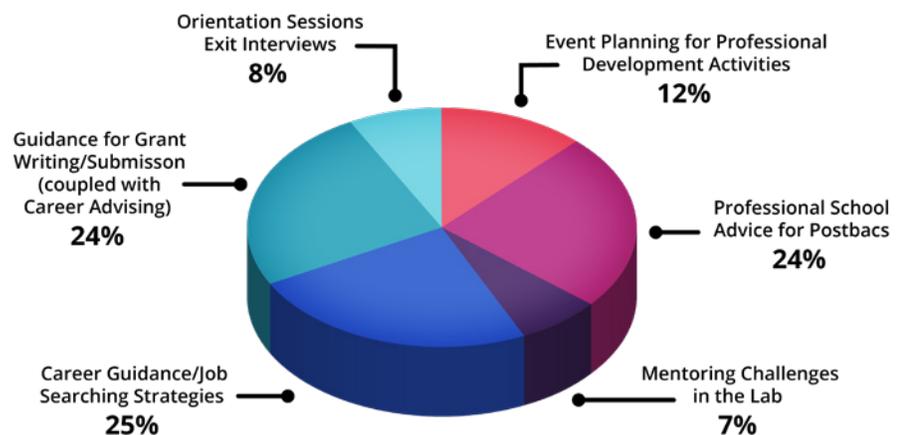
Phone: 301-435-1104

Email: erin.walsh@nih.gov

The NICHD Office of Education is located in **Building 31, Room 1B44**.

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Percent of NICHD Office of Education Appointment Topics



A New Year, A New You: A Focus on Mental Wellbeing

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NIH-WIDE RESOURCES

Beyond the NICHD Office of Education, fellows have access to a variety of NIH support services. Below is a list of offices, websites, and telephone numbers to keep in mind if you need help.

OFFICE OF INTRAMURAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION (OITE)

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

301-496-2427

The OITE mission is to enhance the training experience of students and fellows on all of the NIH campuses.

Wellness Resources from OITE

For upcoming schedule of events visit [Upcoming OITE Events](#).

- » Tune In & Take Care: Managing Stress and Promoting Wellbeing
- » Workshop: Becoming a Resilient Scientist
- » Mindfulness Meditation Groups
- » Wellness Wednesdays
- » Resilience Groups
- » Monthly Wellness Events
- » OITE Blog Posts on Wellness

Information about these resources can be found at

<https://www.training.nih.gov/wellness>.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

<https://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/EAP>

301-496-3164

The purpose of the EAP is to help employees and fellows deal with personal and/or work-related issues that might adversely impact their job performance, health, and wellbeing in a confidential and neutral manner.

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A New Year, A New You: A Focus on Mental Wellbeing

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NIH-WIDE RESOURCES (CONTINUED) THE NIH CIVIL PROGRAM

<https://hr.nih.gov/working-nih/civil>

301-402-4845

The Civil Program's mission is to foster civility throughout the NIH community. Contact the Civil Program if you become aware of a workplace situation involving uncivil behavior, such as harassment, sexual harassment, inappropriate conduct, intimidation, bullying, or other unproductive, disruptive, and/or violent behaviors.

OMBUDSMAN

<https://www.ombudsman.nih.gov>

301-594-7231

The purpose of the Office of the Ombudsman is to reduce disputes and enhance conflict management at the NIH. They offer several services, including consultation, coaching, mediation, facilitation, and training activities.

WANT TO READ MORE ABOUT NIH SUPPORT PROGRAMS?

Check out these previously published articles from *The NICHD Connection*:

["NIH Resources for Ups, Downs, and Everything in Between"](#)

By Shana R. Spindler, PhD

["How to Find NIH Support Programs for You"](#)

By Courtney Kurtyka, PhD

The Rep Report

By Suna Gulay, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences IC Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the FelCom meeting every month and share the latest news with you here. Do you have a concern or question that you want brought up at the next meeting? Contact me at suna.gulay@nih.gov!



Dear NICHD fellows,

We start the year off with interesting opportunities, sure to help you in your career-related new year's resolutions.

- » **Biomedical training and teaching:** Check out the FAES Open House on **Thursday, January 17** to find out about any classes you may want to take, to deepen your scientific knowledge or to explore different careers. Also, make sure to subscribe to [Fellow-L listserv](#) for any last-minute teaching opportunity announcements!
- » **Science writing:** Have you heard of the ["I am Intramural"](#) blog? This is a blog largely maintained by intramural trainees that tackles topics ranging from exciting science news to NIH training experiences. For article ideas and writing opportunities on this blog and on the *NIH Catalyst*, please contact [Craig Myrum](#), the current FelCom outreach officer.
- » **Leadership opportunities:** The Visiting Fellows Committee (VFC) is looking for two co-chairs and a website administrator. The elections will be held on **Wednesday, February 13 at 1 p.m. in Building 2, Room 2W15**. If you want to learn more about any of these positions, please contact the current co-chairs [Ulrike Böhm](#) and [Daphnée Villoing](#). Alternatively, you can join the next VFC meeting on **Wednesday, January 9 at 1 p.m. in Building 2, Room 2W15**. If you already know you want to serve in this active committee, please send a statement of interest to the co-chairs by **5 p.m. on Monday, February 11**, along with:
 - Name, position, field of research, country
 - Contact information
 - Institute, Division and Branch
 - Bio
 - Intended length of stay within NIH

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The Rep Report

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- » **Job search:** Are you interested in international research and employment opportunities? Make sure to subscribe to [VFC-L listserv](#) and follow their “Science Voices from Home” events. The next two will feature Poland and Japan.
- » **Other career development:** The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of the postdoctoral experience in the United States. NIH trainees have affiliate membership to this organization, as described in [July’s Rep Report](#).
 - [2019 NPA Annual Conference](#) is set to take place in Orlando, Florida, April 12-14, 2019. The conference aims to bring postdoctoral scholars, administrators, faculty, and representatives from disciplinary societies, industry, and corporations together. It also features a career fair and excellent networking opportunities. If interested, early-bird registration is possible until **Friday, January 11**.
 - The NPA is largely run by member volunteers, who are postdocs like us. They are currently seeking a motivated and committed leader to serve as the next co-chair of the Meetings Committee. If interested, please contact the current NPA Liaison of FelCom, [Helena Farkasova](#).
- » **Social:** Would you like to get to know other NIH postdoctoral trainees but keep missing the social activities? Join [Bethesda Postdocs](#) to learn about events taking place within the community and stay connected.

Have a happy and productive 2019!



Three-Minute Talks (TmT) Competition 2019: Science Communication Training and Awards Program

For postdoc & clinical fellows, graduate students & postbacs

We're excited to let you know that we will soon be accepting participants for the 2019 Three-Minute Talks (TmT) competition. This is a terrific opportunity for you to learn (and practice!) how to explain your research in a way that's meaningful to scientists outside your specialized field—a skill that's become increasingly important for you all.

Starting late February, all fellows will get professional training in speech development and presentation delivery, plus one-on-one coaching and feedback in a supportive environment. Our goal is to help you gain skills and confidence in oral communication, so you can become even more effective as researchers. And to end this year's TmT activities, our finalists will present at the final event in the summer to compete with fellows from other institutes.

We really encourage each of you to consider taking part in this—it will be well worth your time.

Sign up information and competition details to soon follow.



Upcoming NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE) Events

For more information and registration, please visit [Upcoming OITE Events](#).

Planning for Career Satisfaction and Success—Postbacs Only (Jan 10)

Choosing and Applying to Medical School (Jan 11)

Postbac Seminar Series (Jan 17)

Ethics in Research Training for Postbacs and Grad Students (Jan 22)

Workplace Dynamics I/II: Self-Awareness, the Key to Professional Success
(Jan 23)

Management Boot Camp (Jan 24 & 25)

Industry: The Organization of Business (Jan 29)

SAVE THE DATE: FEBRUARY 21, NIH GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

The [15th Annual NIH Graduate Student Research Symposium](#) will be held on Thursday, February 21, 2018, 9 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. at Natcher Conference Center. The daylong event includes:

- » Keynote address
- » Elevator pitch competition
- » Student talks
- » Poster presentations of dissertation research
- » Presentation of the annual Outstanding Mentor Awards
- » The annual GPP graduation ceremony
- » NIH Graduate Student Research Awards (NGSRAs)
- » Community networking event

All graduate students performing their doctoral dissertation research at NIH are eligible and encouraged to participate (500-word abstracts). All poster presenters are eligible to compete for the NIH Graduate Student Research Awards (NGSRAs, travel awards). To submit an abstract, please visit: <https://www.training.nih.gov/gsc/symposium/15th>.

January Announcements

PREPARING FOR THE JOB MARKET: INDIVIDUAL COACHING SESSIONS

Our industry careers consultant, Lauren Celano, will be available for 30- or 60-minute one-on-one sessions with fellows on **Wednesday, February 20**, and **Monday, February 25**.

The content of these sessions is flexible—feel free to discuss and ask questions about anything related to the industry job market and how to enhance your competitiveness, and/or receive individualized feedback on your current application materials. Possible discussion points may include:

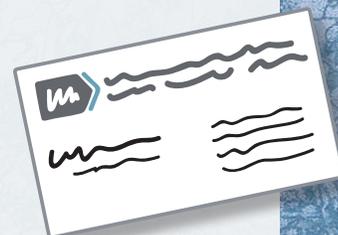
- » Tailoring your resume and/or cover letter to a specific job posting
- » Job searching strategies tailored to your interest
- » Understanding the types of industry jobs available to PhD scientists
- » Tips for improving your LinkedIn page
- » Ways to improve your networking skills for industry careers

Lauren Celano is the co-founder and CEO of [Propel Careers](#), a Boston-based life science search and career development firm focused on connecting talented individuals with entrepreneurial life sciences companies. Propel works with current leaders and actively cultivates future leaders through full-time placement, mentoring, career coaching, and networking. Propel Careers is engaged across all areas of life sciences, including therapeutics, medical devices, healthcare IT, diagnostics, and consulting.

Up to 32 slots are available. Please email Dr. Erin Walsh at erin.walsh@nih.gov if you would like to sign up for an individual session with Lauren.

BUSINESS CARD PRINTING NOW AVAILABLE THROUGH THE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

The Office of Education is offering business card printing for all NICHD fellows. Along with the official NICHD logo, cards can be customized to display your name and title/position, laboratory section or affinity group, and contact information. Please email Ms. Carol Carnahan at carnahac@mail.nih.gov if you are interested.

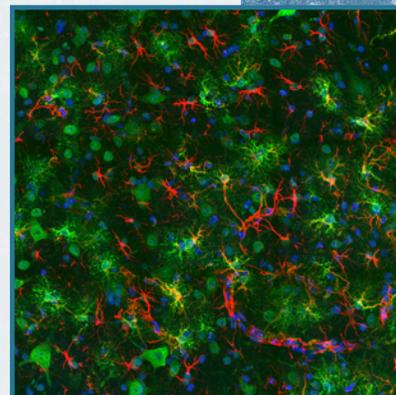


CALLING ALL FELLOWS OF NICHD—IT'S IMAGE COMPETITION TIME!

We are beginning our search for the feature image of the 15th Annual NICHD Fellows Meeting.

The winning image, chosen by the Fellows Advisory Committee, will be showcased on the retreat website, on posters, and used as the front cover of the event program. Also, to highlight everyone's imagery, all submissions we receive will be used to produce a collage posted on the 2019 retreat website. You can always take a look at the image submissions from previous years at <http://retreat.nichd.nih.gov>.

In addition to image resolution and quality, selection criteria include the relevance to our institute's mission and artistic view of the image. All submissions (at the highest possible resolution) should be sent to Nicki Swan (jonasnic@mail.nih.gov) by **January 31, 2019 with a brief caption for the image**.



At right, last year's winning image by Jacob Gluski, Le Pichon lab.

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January Announcements

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NICHD FELLOWS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: SEEKING NEW MEMBERS

The Office of Education formed an advisory committee in 2016, and we are seeking several more dedicated members to help us develop and initiate academic support programs for the institute. Both domestic and visiting fellows are needed. We want to achieve a broad representation, culturally and academically, so we can address the needs of all our trainees at NICHD. The committee meets monthly to exchange ideas and informally discuss ways we can enhance and tailor the training experience within the NICHD intramural program.

Some potential topics for our committee are how to:

- » Increase the participation for training activities
- » Expose fellows to various careers in science
- » Identify teaching opportunities and internal and external research funding mechanisms
- » Establish a structure for sharing scientific and career resources within the institute

****New this year, the advisory committee will also steer the 15th Annual NICHD Fellows' Retreat, to be held in Spring 2019.***

This includes developing the agenda/program, inviting speakers, reviewing abstracts, selecting fellow/student presenters, and moderating some of the sessions—it's a great service opportunity, plus you'll get to be part of the team that plans our biggest annual event for fellows!

Don't miss this opportunity to serve your intramural NICHD community.

The committee meets once a month on Thursdays, from 3 to 4 p.m.

Upcoming dates listed below:

- » January 10
- » February 14
- » March 14

Please contact Dr. Erin Walsh at erin.walsh@nih.gov if you are interested in joining the group.

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January Announcements

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THE BUSINESS OF SCIENCE: YOUR GUIDE TO CAREER SUCCESS

***A new training for fellows and graduate students preparing for their professional career transition
Coming Soon—Early 2019!***

We will offer this certificate program by [SciPhD](#) as a four-day course in March and April 2019 at the NIH. Enrollment will be open for 40 NICHD trainees.

The course is designed to help academic scientists prepare for their next positions in academia, industry, or government—research or non-research. Students will experience hands-on learning of the business and social skills necessary to succeed in the professional world.

At present, the course is also offered at highly respected research institutes, such as New York University, University of California San Francisco, University of California Irvine, and the New York Academy of Sciences. Ninety percent of the people who applied for jobs while taking the course reported that *The Business of Science* helped them land an interview or job offer!

Throughout the program, you will have the exciting opportunity to:

- » Discover the many career paths in which having a PhD can make you a competitive job candidate
- » Develop your professional communication, mentoring, project management and negotiating skills, as well as your financial literacy
- » Research a job ad and identify the scientific, business, and social skills that the company is looking for
- » Develop a targeted resume that demonstrates your specific qualifications
- » Expand your science network
- » Take part in mock interviews that will prepare you for your own job searches

Course instructors will hone into common research practices that academic scientists are already familiar with, to help in the understanding of business concepts, and to demonstrate how your own experiences can mold you into a competitive job candidate.

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January Announcements

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AAAS MASS MEDIA SCIENCE & ENGINEERING SUMMER FELLOWSHIP Applications open October 16 – January 15!

From the AAAS Mass Media Fellowship [website](#):

This highly competitive program strengthens the connections between scientists and journalists by placing advanced undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate level scientists, engineers and mathematicians at media organizations nationwide. Fellows have worked as reporters, editors, researchers, and production assistants at such media outlets as the *Los Angeles Times*, National Public Radio, *The Washington Post*, *WIRED*, and *Scientific American*.

For 10 weeks during the summer, the Mass Media Fellows use their academic training in the sciences as they research, write and report today's headlines, sharpening their abilities to communicate complex scientific issues to non-specialists. Participants come in knowing the importance of translating their work for the public, but they leave with the tools and the know-how to accomplish this important goal.

For additional information about the program visit aaas.org/mmfellowship.

January Events

MONDAY, JANUARY 7 & 14, NOON – 1 PM

“Life as a Primary Care Physician”

“Professionalism in Medicine”

April Walker, MD

These workshops are part of the 9-week course available for all NICHD postbacs. Pre-registration was required. For more information on upcoming opportunities, please contact Dr. Erin Walsh at erin.walsh@nih.gov.

MONDAY, JANUARY 28, NOON – 1 PM

“Meet the Scientist: Basic Research”

Mark Stopfer, PhD and Judith Kassis, PhD

This workshop is part of the 9-week course available for all NICHD postbacs. Pre-registration was required. For more information on upcoming opportunities, please contact Dr. Erin Walsh at erin.walsh@nih.gov.

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January Events

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 5:30 – 7:30 PM

Fellows Social Networking (FSN) Event

[Tapp'd](#), a local restaurant in Bethesda

This is a great opportunity for the NICHD fellows' community to socialize and network with each other (*with good food!*) in an enjoyable environment. All current trainees within the institute are welcome.

Please send Dr. Erin Walsh (erin.walsh@nih.gov) a quick note if you plan to attend this event.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 30, 10 AM – NOON

"Identify the Career for You and Learn How to Build Your Network"

In this workshop, Drs. Faith Harrow (training director at NHGRI) and Yvette Pittman will introduce you to the career planning tools My Individual Development Plan ([myIDP](#)) and Active Career Exploration ([ACE](#)).

Using these tools, you will assess your skills, interests and values; see how they align with various career paths; and "build your network from zero"—all leading to career success. Please email Dr. Erin Walsh (erin.walsh@nih.gov) if you are interested in attending.

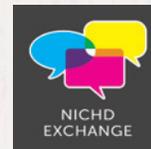
THURSDAY, JANUARY 31, 1 – 3 PM

NICHD Exchange: "Gene Editing"

Bldg. 35A, Conference Room 620/630

We have all heard of GMOs (genetically modified organisms), but are we entering the era of Genetically Modified HUMANS? Recent news of the first babies born following genetic modification of human embryos has stunned both the scientific community and general public. Gene editing is very quickly being recognized as one of the most important techniques in biomedical research, with an increasing number of scientists also interested in its clinical use to prevent and/or treat disease.

Join your colleagues for a discussion on how intramural and extramural NICHD researchers are using genome editing technologies to advance science and the political and ethical implications of this work. All NICHD staff (administrative, DIPHR, intramural, and extramural) are invited to attend.



GENOME EDITING: rewriting fate

January 31, 2019 • 1-3 PM • Building 35A, Room 620/630

SLICING & DIZING: THE FUTURE OF GENE EDITING
Tim Peiris, PhD
Unit on Cellular and Molecular Neurodevelopment

WHY AREN'T SO SIMPLE: SO MANY SPERMATOGENIC GENES, SO LITTLE TIME TO KNOCK THEM OUT!
Smart Moun, PhD
Fertility and Infertility Branch

TRIAL IN ABSENTIA: USING GENE EDITING TO UNDERSTAND NUCLEOPHIN FUNCTION THROUGH REGULATED DEGRADATION
Mary Elmore, PhD
Section on Cell Cycle Regulation

GENE EDITING TO FIX HERITABLE DISORDERS IN CHILDREN: OPENING PANDORA'S BOX
Melissa Patis, MD, PhD
Infectious and Developmental Disabilities Branch

NIH Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development