

The NICHD Connection

October 2020

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Thoughts of a Postbac: Pandemic-Induced Career Exploration

By Nickolas “Nick” Chu

Covid-19 and the resulting stay-at-home orders have presented trainees with setbacks to their research endeavors, especially for benchwork-dependent projects. However, time away from the lab has afforded us with an amount of downtime that some haven’t experienced since high school. To capitalize on the time at home, some postbacs have started to explore scientific careers outside of the lab. I interviewed my peers Lily Nguyen and Frances Fernando who are doing just that, to jump start my own career exploration. They have agreed to share their stories with the broader NICHD community to connect with other trainees in the same boat.

Postbac fellow **Lily Nguyen** has taken advantage of this time to explore careers in science policy. Like many who aim to enter graduate school, Lily had been working under the assumption that her career path would lead her to work in academia. Without a strong interest in becoming a PI, however, she attended this summer’s OITE career fair to explore other options.

Lily was drawn to the career panels related to science communication and policy—having played an active role in student government during her time in college. From Lily’s experience in student government, she discovered her excitement in writing policies to enact systemic change. By listening to the panels and following up with informational interviews, she felt reassured that individuals with a background in science are not confined to research or benchwork.

Thoughts of a Postbac



Nickolas “Nick” Chu

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Letter from the Editor

For many fellows, COVID-19 has rendered time at home a daily given rather than a weekend luxury. Those extra days *dans la maison* are sure to look different for everyone. Have you wondered what other fellows are up to during their coronavirus lock-down? I have. But as Editor in Chief of a newsletter, I don't have to just wonder—I can ask!

And ask I did. For our [feature article](#) this month, postbac fellow Nick Chu shares career-defining reflections during the extra time at home. He presents several stories from his fellow postbac colleagues, and it's clear that COVID-19 has left an indelible mark on their career goals.

You also have the opportunity in this issue to meet Dr. Ya-Ling Lu without leaving your couch. Dr. Lu works at the NIH Library and is ready and willing to help you with your research needs. Check out [page 4](#) for an introduction to Dr. Lu and a comprehensive list of resources she and the NIH Library provide for NIH fellows.

We round out our October newsletter with a "[Clinical Corner](#)" introduction to Dr. Vivian Szymczuk, several fun photos of NICHD fellows at home in "[Life Outside Lab](#)," Dr. Anshika Jain's "[Rep Report](#)," and the [October announcements](#) and [events](#).

Enjoy the cooler fall weather and background images. See you in November!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Please send your questions and comments to our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.



Pandemic-Induced Career Exploration

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Encouraged by the possibility of combining her interests in science research and policy, Lily is developing skills important for a career in science policy. Currently, she writes articles for the *NIH Catalyst* in order to improve her scientific writing skills.

One of the *NICHD Connection's* own contributors, **Frances Fernando**, has also taken the opportunity to explore her career options. Frances has always had an interest in global health and had wanted to be a physician since childhood. Now, during the worst public health crisis in recent history, she has reevaluated her goals. Her consistent interest in multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving coupled with her growing interest in health systems has set her on a new path towards global health program development.

Frances views the degree to which the pandemic has afflicted the US as “a symptom of major issues in our health system.” She feels that people are most aware of public health’s role in society when systems are broken, with dire consequences for society’s wellbeing. Frances now sets her sights on acquiring a Doctor of Public Health in order to better develop our health systems.

My own career exploration during this pandemic is what inspired me to write this article. Since I was young, I have been fascinated by science and research. And like Lily and many others who plan to go to graduate school, I assumed I would eventually work in academia. I enjoy doing research, teaching others, and sharing my excitement for discovery. However, I am also interested in areas that may make me better suited for a career outside of a lab setting.

While exploring different careers, I have considered becoming a psychologist or psychiatrist because I enjoy working with people and helping them through their problems. However, my love for learning and discovery nudged me towards a career in research. Now, with more free time available to me, I have been reflecting on my interests and career goals.

I have realized that I enjoy regularly working in teams and communicating with others. I also enjoy teaching, learning, and problem solving. To find alternative careers that may better combine my interests, I am currently exploring opportunities related to science communication, writing, and career counseling. While I haven’t settled on a specific goal just yet, it’s comforting to know that others like me are rewriting their futures too.

Hello from the NIH Library: Your Research Collaborators

By Ya-Ling Lu, PhD

My name is Ya-Ling Lu, and I have been working with NICHD for more than five years providing library resources and support to NIH researchers. My primary responsibility in the NIH Library is in bibliometrics. If you have a puzzled face, you are not alone. I have a PhD in information studies from UCLA, and many people have asked me what bibliometrics is. My short version of the answer is that bibliometrics is the study of publications and their research impact.

As someone who loves information and its dissemination, I value hearing about your research interests and information needs. I complete searches on a variety of topics and provide consultations based on my findings. Think of me as your collaborator; my goal is to help you explore and expand your research.



Ya-Ling Lu, PhD

In this issue, I highlight the virtual research resources and services provided by the NIH Library:



BOOKS

- » **NIH Library eBook Search:** extend your research with our collection of 160,000+ scholarly eBooks.
- » **OverDrive:** download and enjoy popular science ebooks and audiobooks on your computer or your personal device.



DATABASES

- » **NIH Library Database Search:** search 50+ reference databases.
- » **Micromedex:** access information about drug information, toxicology, diseases, acute care, and alternative medicine.
- » **PubMed @ NIH:** use this link to search PubMed and get direct access to articles that the NIH Library subscribes to, or the ability to request articles the Library does not have by clicking the "NIH Library Go" button.
- » **Scopus:** explore this extensive abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature, including scientific journals, books, and conference proceedings.
- » **UpToDate:** use this clinical decision resource, either online or on your mobile device, to stay abreast of clinical information and standards and to make point-of-care decisions.
- » **Web of Science:** search this comprehensive scientific indexing database comprising citations from research literature published in journals, conference proceedings, symposia, and seminars.

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Remote access note: NIH staff can access these resources directly through the links below or via the [NIH Library website](#) while working on the VPN. The resources can also be accessed without being on the VPN by going through the Library's [remote access page](#) and using your NIH PIV card and/or credentials.

Hello from the NIH Library

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JOURNALS

- » [NIH Library Journal Search](#): explore the NIH Library collection of 12,000+ current and historical journals, most with complete archives.
- » [BrowZine](#): turn your mobile device ([app download](#)) or computer ([desktop interface](#)) into a personalized, portable journal bookshelf of your favorite NIH Library research journals .
- » **Featured Journals:** access articles from the NIH Library's most frequently used journals.
 - » [JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association](#)
 - » [Journal of Biological Chemistry](#)
 - » [Nature](#)
 - » [NEJM: The New England Journal of Medicine](#)
 - » [PNAS: Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#)
 - » [Science](#)

REFERENCE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

- » [EndNote](#): download the EndNote application for free from the NIH Library to manage your bibliographic references.
- » [Mendeley](#): organize your research, collaborate with others online, and discover research.

VIDEOS

- » [JoVE Science Education Videos](#): stay updated on scientific fundamentals in easy-to-follow video demonstrations created by experts at top institutions.
- » [SAGE Data Science Videos](#): discover innovative methods and best practices for data analysis, data visualization, and computational social science research.

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Hello from the NIH Library

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ONLINE SERVICES

Here are a few of the many ways the NIH Library can assist you online:

- » **Bibliometrics**: we provide publication analysis services to NIH staff in support of their review or promotion.
- » **Bioinformatics**: we help NIH researchers further their understanding of the molecular basis of disease.
- » **Document Delivery**: we help you get articles, books, and documents from our collection or from other libraries around the world if those items are not held by the NIH Library.
- » **Editing**: we provide light and medium manuscript editing, assistance with preparing your manuscript for peer review, and fee-based substantive editing work.
- » **Literature Searches**: we assist with developing and conducting a thorough, systematic, search of the literature for your topic, including high-impact journals in the related field, gray literature, personal communications, and books.
- » **Systematic Reviews**: we provide help with every step of your systematic review, including research question development, searching, screening, data abstraction, and manuscript writing and editing.



ONLINE TRAINING

The NIH Library Training Program is a premier provider of information and data management training for the NIH intramural research community. Classes are free, available to NIH staff, and are currently being offered entirely online via WebEx. All sessions are taught by dedicated subject matter experts including NIH Library staff, guest instructors, and industry experts. Check out the [training calendar](#) to browse the classes!

To stay up to date on NIH Library classes, events, resources, and services, subscribe to our [e-news](#). Contact me today (ya-ling.lu@nih.gov) and let me know how the NIH Library can help you with your online information and research needs.



Clinical Corner: Meet Dr. Vivian Szymczuk

Vivian Szymczuk, MD, is a new clinical fellow in the [Pediatric Endocrinology Inter-Institute Training Program](#). Before arriving at the NIH this year, Dr. Szymczuk attended medical school at the University of Medicine and Health Sciences St. Kitts, followed by residency training at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria. She most appreciates spending time with and learning from her patients, who she considers truly the best teachers. Outside of research and medical work, she enjoys yoga, video games (especially *Civilization 6*) and being out on the water on a paddle board.

We asked Dr. Szymczuk a few questions about her research and clinical interests to get to know the person behind the degree. Introducing Dr. Szymczuk:

*Clinical
Corner*



Vivian Szymczuk, MD

What are your specific research interests?

I recently joined the Skeletal Disorders and Mineral Homeostasis Section of the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. I am in the early phase of developing a research project, but I am most interested in translational research. I very much enjoy the cellular biology aspects of research as well as clinical applicability.

What influenced you to go into pediatric endocrinology?

Many experiences starting early in my life and throughout my training have shaped my desire for a career involving the clinical and academic aspects of pediatric endocrinology. While I have very much enjoyed all aspects of my general pediatrics training, there is nothing that compares to the excitement I experience with endocrine cases. My clinical interest in endocrinology first started when my younger sister developed Type 1 Diabetes. It was at that time that I was exposed to the awesome power of the pediatricians that brought her back to health, which left an impact that I carry with me when caring for patients to this day. This experience allows me to appreciate the emotions that a child and their family are going through and how their lives are about to change. It continues to inform the way I empower them to manage their difficult condition.

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Clinical Corner: Meet Dr. Vivian Szymczuk

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Aside from this personal relationship with endocrinology in my own life, this field is also the most intellectually interesting and stimulating to me. Every specialty requires a basic science understanding to inform management; however, I feel that in endocrinology the biomolecular and cellular level of understanding—which to me is the most fascinating—has a clinical application of basic science that directly relates to and explains the intriguing presentations of endocrine disorders. I have loved jigsaw puzzles for as long as I can remember. Clinical practice is the most enthralling of puzzles, uncovering pieces and integrating them together to form a coherent whole, proceeding systematically from the mystery of the unknown to the deep satisfaction of the known. This is why I wake up in the morning. This love of the biomolecular and cellular level of inquiry that is so clinically relevant also naturally leads to my deep desire to pursue endocrine research.

What led you to the NIH?

Along with this evolution of my interest in the clinical aspects of endocrinology, there was a parallel series of experiences that developed my desire for research. I chose the NIH given the advanced research training I could obtain here.

I was first exposed to research during my undergraduate honors project. I became the only undergraduate student selected for a position with the Department of Cellular and Molecular Medicine, where I learned the experimental techniques necessary to independently investigate a cellular mechanism involved in muscular dystrophy. There was one especially astonishing moment where I held a petri dish of newly differentiated muscle cells and saw them contract. I have pursued research ever since, much of which has been clinical in nature.

As a medical student on my pediatric orthopedic surgery rotation, I spearheaded multiple projects, which resulted in being offered a position as a research fellow at the Rubin Institute for Advanced Orthopedics and the International Center for Limb Lengthening in Baltimore prior to residency. Within residency, I continued to pursue research opportunities as they emerged in various fields, but I was most drawn to my work on hyperthyrotropinemia and diabetic ketoacidosis.

Related to academics in general, I deeply appreciate communicating my hard-earned knowledge to the next generation of physicians to further expand my impact. It is why I have consistently pursued teaching throughout my life, and why I will continue to do so in the future. Sharing in the experience of understanding is yet another joy afforded to me in this fascinating field, and I want to teach both the clinical and research aspects of medicine, which is another reason for picking the NIH.

Life Outside Lab: Fellows at Home

Kayaking through the “Ghost Fleet” at Mallow's Bay-Potomac River National Marine Sanctuary.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. SHANA SPINDLER



Postdoctoral fellow Dr. Anshika Jain (our FelCom Basic Science Rep) goofing around with her daughter and working on home projects to keep her engaged!

PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. ANSHIKA JAIN



Postbac fellow Nick Chu taking the time for an outdoor painting session.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICK CHU



The Rep Report

By Anshika Jain, PhD

As the current NICHD Basic Sciences Institutes and Centers (IC) Representative, I represent NICHD postdoctoral fellows at the Fellows Committee (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 anshika.jain@nih.gov!



FelCom welcomes the following newly elected members:

FelCom Membership Secretary: **Leanne Low**

FARE committee: **Prabha Shrestha**

Career Development Committee co-chairs: **Takerra Johnson and Tam Vo**

Visiting Fellows Committee co-chair: **Zeni Wu**

Good news for NIH fellows! Effective November 1, 2020, dental and vision will be included in FAES medical benefits. The 2020/2021 benefit guide is now available on the [FAES website](#).

The **Recreation and Welfare/Health and Wellness Committees** encourage postdocs to join the [Bethesda Postdoc Slack Page](#) to engage in wellness and virtual workout programs. Please contact the committee's liaison Tiffany Zarrella at tiffany.zerrella@nih.gov for more information.

The National Postdoc Association (NPA) remains dedicated to providing resources and information to all members of the postdoctoral community, as we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic together. NPA encourages you to share your story about how bias, discrimination, racism, and social inequities have impacted not only your postdoctoral experience but your career pathway, anonymously, at the following page: <http://ow.ly/6oB150ANAQP>.

Remember, all postdocs at NIH have a free NPA membership. Benefits include access to the NPA Career Center and POSTDOCKET newsletter.

Stay tuned for more information from the FelCom committee in the next month's newsletter.

Stay well and stay safe, everyone!

October Announcements

APPLICATIONS OPEN FOR 2021 NCI TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER AMBASSADORS PROGRAM (TTAP)

This hybrid training/mentoring immersion program offers postdoctoral fellows the opportunity to augment their current research activities with 5-8 hours/week hands-on training in biomedical invention development, commercialization, and entrepreneurship.

The TTAP was developed at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) Technology Transfer Center, which services the technology transfer needs for NCI as well as [9 other institutes](#) including NICHD.

More information about the program, as well as a pre-recorded information session, can be found at <https://techtransfer.cancer.gov/aboutttc/ambassadors>. Questions can be directed to TT_Ambassadors@mail.nih.gov.

If you are interested in joining the TTAP, download the application from the website and return with the requested materials to TT_Ambassadors@mail.nih.gov by **Tuesday, December 1, 2020**.

GAIN PROGRAMMING SKILLS WHILE TELEWORKING FROM HOME

During this time of extended telework, the NICHD's Bioinformatics and Scientific Programming Core (BSPC) is offering to help fellows gain valuable programming and data analysis skills. BSPC can provide several resources for learning the R programming language as well as develop custom learning plans using online resources to meet specific learning goals. If you are interested in programming and data analysis, please contact Dr. Ryan Dale at ryan.dale@nih.gov.

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October Announcements

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CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS!

Behind the Mask: Real Stories from NIH Staff About Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since January 2020, COVID-19 has impacted the NIH community in many ways—from researching and providing information about the disease, to developing therapeutics and vaccines, to caring for patients in the Clinical Center, to re-configuring the ways we perform our jobs. To preserve this important period in NIH history, the Office of NIH History and Stetten Museum has initiated “*Behind the Mask: Real Stories from NIH Staff About Life During the COVID-19 Pandemic.*” The project is seeking personal reflections about how those who work at NIH have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and is collecting documents, photos, objects, and other types of media that will help narrate the story of COVID-19. Materials in languages other than English, such as Spanish, will be accepted.

To learn more about the project and to participate, visit:

[https://history.nih.gov/display/history/Behind+the+Mask.](https://history.nih.gov/display/history/Behind+the+Mask)

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October Announcements

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NEXT MONTH: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13, ANNUAL NICHD DIR & DIPHR JOINT SCIENTIFIC RETREAT

Please mark your calendars for the annual NICHD DIR & DIPHR Joint Scientific Retreat which will be held virtually this year on **Friday, November 13**. More information coming soon!



CALL FOR RETREAT POSTERS

Registration for poster presentations at the NICHD DIR & DIPHR Scientific Retreat is now open at <https://dir.nichd.nih.gov>. **The deadline for poster registration is Friday, October 30th.**

POSTER GUIDANCE

1. Since this year's posters will be virtual, there are no limits to the number of posters a lab may submit. Please get approval from your PI prior to submitting.
2. Any member of a lab may present a poster.
3. Posters will be made available on a website for colleagues to view November 13 through November 20. There will be no live poster presentations.
4. Posters may be presented in one of two ways: either by (1) uploading the poster itself, or (2) uploading a 2–3 minute video of you presenting the poster. Your contact information will be displayed along with the poster so colleagues can contact you by email if they have questions or want to hear more about your work.

Thank you all for contributing to the occasion!

2020 Retreat Organizing Committee

Jessica Gleason, PhD, MPH
Anshika Jain, PhD

Tonja Nansel, PhD
Gigi Storz, PhD

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October Announcements

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NEW! NICHD VIRTUAL GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP

Thursday, November 19 & Friday, November 20

Led by Dr. Cedric Williams (Professor, University of Virginia), this two-day virtual workshop will lay the foundation on how to develop research ideas, identify the right experiments to answer specific questions, and determine how to strengthen existing proposals to address significant biomedical problems. Fellows will also participate in small-group discussions focused on reading, evaluating, and providing feedback on their materials.

Developing Ideas for Meaningful Grant Proposals (Thursday, November 19, 2–5 p.m.)

In this seminar, Dr. Williams will focus on developing comprehensive research proposals, with an emphasis on content, format, and range of information needed for well-written proposals that successfully address intellectual merit and overall impact. There will also be ample time for questions and dynamic group discussions.

Hands-On Workshop: Integrating Proposal Development with Review and Evaluation (Friday, November 20, 10 a.m.–12 noon; 1–3 p.m.)

This workshop will build on ideas from Day 1, with specific focus on idea generation, grant writing clarity and integrating feedback/evaluation in order to improve your proposals. Participants will break into small groups to evaluate and discuss ideas, building clarity on the following:

- » General statement of research plan
- » Variables to be manipulated
- » Outcome variables
- » Methods necessary to accomplish research objectives
- » Significance of research project

Please contact Ms. Monica Cooper (cooperm@mail.nih.gov) to register for this workshop.

October Events

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1–2:30 PM NICHD Postbac Orientation Session

Our institute has approximately 100 postbacs conducting both clinical and basic science research. The Office of Education would like to bring our postbacs together to meet each other and discuss volunteer and training opportunities on campus, while also facilitating the transition of postbacs back to the physical workspace in situations where a return is appropriate.

We aim to enrich fellows' NIH experience with career development, outreach, and social activities. Learn about:

- » NIH Library resources
- » The annual NICHD postbac seminar series
- » Shadowing opportunities in the NIH Clinical Center
- » And more!

This year's NICHD Postbac Orientation Session is *mandatory* for all postbacs who started in January 2020 or after. To register, please contact Ms. Monica Cooper (cooperm@mail.nih.gov).

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 3–4 PM NICHD Diversity Program Trainee Start Up Session

This session will be conducted by Dr. Triesta Fowler, Director of Communications and Outreach from the Office of Education. The fellows who are a part of the NICHD DIR diversity initiatives are invited to attend. This introductory session will allow the participants to get to know each other and develop a community that will be a source of support throughout their time in the program. We will review topics for future discussions and roundtable meetings that will help navigate this part of the trainees' academic and professional journey.

To register for this session please contact Dr. Triesta Fowler (fowlerlt@nih.gov).

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 9 AM–3:30 PM Responsible Conduct of Research Training for New NICHD Postdocs "Becoming a Responsible Scientist"

*This full-day training is part of the **mandatory RCR requirements for all new NICHD postdocs.***

Led by the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE), this session will include an online training module that focuses on the topics of scientific integrity, publication and authorship, peer review, mentor-trainee relationship, and data acquisition and management.

For additional dates and registration, visit the [RCR for Postdocs OITE webpage](#). Participation is tracked by the NICHD Office of Education.

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October Events

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22 & TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27

Preparing for the Job Market: Individual Coaching Sessions with Lauren Celano of [Propel Careers](#)

Our industry careers consultant, Lauren Celano, will be available for one-on-one sessions with fellows on **Thursday, October 22 and Tuesday, October 27 (between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m.)**.

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.

Only a limited number of slots are available. Please email Monica Cooper (cooperm@mail.nih.gov) if you would like to sign up for an individual session with Lauren.

ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS

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

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

NIH Library Training and Events

For more information and registration, please visit the [NIH Library Calendar](#).