Demystifying Science Communications with Linda Huynh, PhD

Linda Huynh, PhD, is a science writer in the NICHD Office of Communications. For almost seven years, Dr. Huynh has helped NICHD scientists get the word out about their research. Perhaps most notably, in 2019, she spearheaded the NICHD Women in Science series with the Women Scientists Advisors (WSA) to communicate the important work of female researchers in the institute. During this year’s Three-minute Talk (TmT) competition on June 30, 2022, Dr. Huynh gave a guest presentation about the importance of working with science communicators and what happens behind the scenes in the press office when a scientific manuscript is published.

We followed up with Dr. Huynh to capture her science communication knowledge for any fellows who missed out on her TmT competition presentation.

**Why is it important to promote our research among non-scientific audiences?**

NIH research is funded by the taxpayer, so it’s important that the public understands the value of their investment. Non-scientists also influence research funding. For example, Congress reviews the proposed NIH budget every year, so it’s critical that everyone understand the significance of research—clinical and basic science—and how scientific advancements can help improve their day-to-day lives.

**What is an embargo, and why are accepted manuscripts put under embargo?**

An embargo is an agreement between the news media (i.e., reporters) and a source (i.e., a science journal or research organization) that a story won’t be released until a set date and time. It’s a chance to alert journalists of an upcoming scientific finding and give them an opportunity to write an article.

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Letter from the Editor

Have you ever wondered how a news agency can run a science story the exact same day the scientific publication is released? No, science writers are not given a complex paper, a lot of coffee, and told to write quickly. Media coverage of a scientific publication requires a bit of behind-the-scenes planning—among the media, press offices, journals, and sometimes even with the scientists themselves. All this to say, to effectively promote your own work, it may help for you to know about the science communication pipeline.

Linda Hyunh, PhD, science writer in the NICHD Office of Communications, graciously agreed to a Q&A with The NICHD Connection to chat about the ins and outs of promoting scientific studies. Learn about the importance of promoting your work, how there can be same-day articles when studies are published, and what to do when your own manuscript has been accepted for publication.

For any fellows who have an interest in the science of science communication, there’s a new NIH Scientific Interest Group (SIG) called the NIH Science of Science Communication (ScioSciComm) SIG, which “plans to focus specifically on the scientific design and evaluation of science communication.” Membership is open to all interested individuals within the NIH. The next meeting will be a journal club on misinformation and disinformation in the context of science communication. To receive details about upcoming events, join the listserv via https://list.nih.gov/cgi-bin/wa.exe?A0=SCIOSCICOMM.

We wrap up this communication-themed issue with a congratulations to our 2023 Fellows Award for Research Excellence recipients, all of whom effectively communicated their research to a panel of judges, and several important funding announcements and career development activities to check out this month. Enjoy the rest of your summer, and we’ll see you in the Fall!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

This is a newsletter for NICHD fellows, by NICHD fellows. We want to hear from you! Please send your questions, comments, and ideas to our editor at shana.spindler@nih.gov.
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This notification is sent via a news release, which provides a summary of the findings, explains why it’s significant, and may include quotes from the paper’s authors.

Reporters and scientists have similar needs—they want to be the first to break a story, and they can be scooped by others. The embargo period gives everyone a fair chance to pursue a story, and it gives the journal or research organization a chance to promote a scientific finding. All of this happens behind-the-scenes, and you don’t see the outcome until an article is published in a newspaper, or you hear it on the radio. If you see extensive media coverage on the same day and time that a scientific paper is published, it was likely facilitated by a news release issued under embargo.

**What should fellows do when a manuscript has been accepted for publication?**

You should have a conversation with your principal investigator about contacting your institute’s press office. It never hurts to notify the press office, especially when you are giving them advance notice before the paper is online. The press team will review the paper and provide options for how to promote the findings. The internet and social media have truly changed the landscape in reaching audiences directly. There are many effective methods outside of a news release. For NICHD, you can reach our team at nichdpress@mail.nih.gov.

**What makes a publication newsworthy?**

The answer depends on the audience and what’s going on locally and around the world. Newsworthiness will differ between outlets, publications, and columns. For instance, the health section of a newspaper will tend to cover clinical findings, whereas the science section may feature basic science or topics like evolution, paleontology, and astrophysics. Newsworthiness is also influenced by real world events. Anytime there’s an outbreak, like Ebola or Zika, or a pandemic, like COVID-19, research or expertise in this area will be newsworthy. Often, research findings that are generalizable to a large audience have the best chance to receive media coverage.

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What should fellows know about sharing their publications on social media? Are there any restrictions?

NIH offers social media guidance for private accounts, [https://www.nih.gov/guidance-private-account-social-media-use-individuals-nih](https://www.nih.gov/guidance-private-account-social-media-use-individuals-nih). NICHD also offers general guidelines, [https://www.nichd.nih.gov/disclaimer#disclaimers](https://www.nichd.nih.gov/disclaimer#disclaimers). If the paper is a preprint, you should make that clear in your post. We encourage you to tag our official Twitter account, [https://twitter.com/nichd_nih](https://twitter.com/nichd_nih), when you promote new papers or job opportunities at NICHD. There’s a chance we can re-tweet the message.

For fellows who are interested in a science communications career, what skills should they acquire?

My advice is two-part: read and write. There are plenty of journalists who cover health and science. Read their work. Examine the structure of their pieces and the reading level. If what you’re writing can’t be understood by a high schooler, you need to make your reading level more accessible.

Look for opportunities in non-scientific publications, like the NIH Catalyst or an alumni magazine, to practice non-technical writing. Try drafting a news article or blog post on a scientific paper that is outside of your field. Let someone who is not a scientist read it and offer feedback. Don’t be dismissive of their feedback; they’re your intended audience. Even if you don’t publish your work, having non-technical writing samples will help you if you’re looking for additional opportunities.
Congratulations to the NICHD FARE 2023 Recipients

Congratulations to all fellows who received the annual Fellows Award for Research Excellence (FARE) for the 2023 competition. FARE is an NIH-wide competition that recognizes the important research of intramural fellows. We extend sincere congratulations to our 15 winners as well as a special thanks to all NICHD fellows who submitted an abstract and shared their research with the intramural community.

Announcing the 2023 NICHD FARE recipients (and their NICHD mentors):

» Swati Gaikwad (Hinnebusch)  
» Amrita Mandal (Balla)  
» Niu Yang (Balla)  
» Saikat Ghosh (Bonifacino)  
» Shreeta Chakraborty (Rocha)  
» Julia Porth (Cheon)  
» Leah Greenspan (Weinstein)  
» Aoshu Zhong (Storz)  
» Mor Alkasasi (Le Pichon)  
» Tho Nguyen (Serpe)  
» Jennifer Panililio (Burgess)  
» Zoe Piccus (Le Pichon)  
» Brian Kim (Stopfer)  
» Priyanka Singh (Hinnebusch)  
» Rakesh Pathak (Levin)  
» Rachel Cosby (Macfarlan)
August Announcements

DUE NEXT MONTH: INTRAMURAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP (IRF)

Funding opportunity for all NICHD fellows

In 2017, DIR launched the Intramural Research Fellowship (IRF), a competitive research funding opportunity for NICHD postdoctoral, visiting, and clinical fellows. Its main objective is to promote grant writing among our intramural trainees, while enhancing awareness of the various components of an NIH grant application.

The IRF submission date is Friday, September 9, 2022.

For more information on the IRF, please visit NICHD Intramural Research Fellowships or email Dr. Triesta Fowler (fowlerlt@mail.nih.gov).

SAVE THE DATE: NICHD POSTBAC ORIENTATION SESSION

Wednesday, September 21, 1 PM

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 opportunities for service and leadership, along with the various resources and services available to you at NICHD and NIH-wide.

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

» NIH Library resources
» The Annual Postbac Seminar Series
» Opportunities for enhancing your science communications skills
» Shadowing opportunities in the NIH Clinical Center
» NICHD Office of Education Services & Resources
» The Office of Intramural Training and Education
» Medical & Graduate School Application Support
» And more!

The NICHD Postbac Orientation Session is mandatory for all postbacs who started on or after January 2022, but all NICHD postbacs are welcome. To register, please contact Ms. Katherine Lamb (katherine.lamb@nih.gov).

NIH UNITE: ENDING STRUCTURAL RACISM (ESR) ACTIVITIES

The NIH UNITE initiative was established to identify and address structural racism within the NIH-supported and the greater scientific community.

The ESR Intranet includes various resources like the Toolkit, Newsletter, FAQs, and other information.

UNITE Milestones and Progress and the Co-Chairs Corner (public ESR webpages) are other avenues to stay informed on UNITE efforts.
August Events

ONGOING EVENTS AROUND CAMPUS

NIH-Wide Office of Intramural Training and Education 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.

WEDNESDAY–THURSDAY, AUGUST 3 & 4
Virtual Summer Poster Day
The event will be hosted on Fourwaves. All visitors and participants must register on the event website to attend.

If you are a summer intern, Summer Research Presentation Week is your time to share the research and creative projects you have been conducting at the NIH with the broader NIH community and your family and friends! At the same time, you will develop your communication and networking skills. More information about the event is available at the OITE Virtual Summer Presentation Day website.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 1–2 PM
The Graduate School Search and Application Process

For those of you applying to graduate school, join us for the next session of our Annual Postbac Seminar Series, “The Graduate School Search and Application Process,” led by Dr. Erin Walsh, Director of the NICHD Office of Education. We will discuss:

» Different career paths requiring PhD training
» Types of graduate programs
» The process of searching for and ranking graduate programs that align with your interests, career goals and values
» How to find suitable labs (and mentors!) for your graduate training
» How to determine if you should consider taking the GRE

Please email Ms. Veronica Harker (veronica.harker@nih.gov) to register for this session.

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August Events
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THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 1–4 PM
NICHD DIR Tenure-Track Investigator Virtual Symposia Series
“Biophysics of lipids in development and disease”
Hosted by Alex Sodt, PhD

This series provides tenure-track investigators within NICHD the opportunity to organize a virtual mini-symposium to showcase their area of science to the NICHD DIR and larger NIH intramural community. These symposia are open to all faculty, trainees, and staff at the NIH.


WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 17, 1 PM
Discussion with Tenure-Track Investigators
Jeffrey A. Farrell, PhD
Sarah E. Sheppard, PhD, MS, MD

The Office of Education is offering an exciting career development activity on Wednesday, August 17th, at 1 p.m. (via Zoom).

Join us for a discussion and Q&A session to hear from two tenure-tracks currently working at NICHD.

This will be an informal, small-group discussion (virtual, via Zoom), in which Drs. Farrell and Sheppard (biographies are on the next page) will give an overview of their work, share their personal/professional background and answer questions about the academic application/interview process and NICHD tenure-track experience.

We would like the fellows to walk away from the session with a sense of what academic search committees are looking for, the types of questions they ask, tips for interviews and chalk talks, what skills are most needed to be successful, what fellows can do during their NIH training to be most prepared, and what life is like on the tenure track.

Please email Ms. Veronica Harker (veronica.harker@nih.gov) if you plan to attend. The Zoom link will be provided to you a few days before the session.

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JEFFREY A. FARRELL, PhD, is an NICHD Stadtman Investigator, heading the Unit on Cell Specification and Differentiation. He received his BA in biochemistry from Columbia University in 2006 and then completed his graduate work at the University of California, San Francisco in the lab of Patrick O’Farrell. There, he found that the dramatic slow-down of DNA replication at the Drosophila mid-blastula transition was triggered by regulated proteolysis of Cdc25 and a resultant drop in Cdk1 activity.

Dr. Farrell continued on to postdoctoral training in the lab of Alexander Schier at Harvard University (in deep collaboration with the lab of Aviv Regev at the Broad Institute). There, he worked on developing and applying single-cell RNAseq approaches for studying developmental biology, including one of the first approaches for spatial inference from single-cell RNAseq data (Seurat), an approach to find transcriptional trajectories during development (URD), and one of the first whole-embryo single-cell RNAseq developmental atlases. His postdoctoral work was featured as part of Science’s 2018 Breakthrough of the Year.

SARAH E. SHEPPARD, PhD, MS, MD, is a 2021 NIH Distinguished Scholar and clinical investigator, heading the Unit on Vascular Malformations at NICHD. She graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a Bachelor of Science in nuclear science and engineering and then attained her medical degree and doctorate through a combined MD-PhD program at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. During her doctorate, Dr. Sheppard studied post-transcriptional regulation of vascular development in the zebrafish in the laboratory of Dr. Nathan Lawson. She then completed her combined pediatrics and clinical genetics residency at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP).

Following her clinical training, she practiced as a clinical geneticist in Division of Human Genetics, the Comprehensive Vascular Anomaly Program, and the Jill and Mark Fishman Lymphatic Center at CHOP. She completed a Masters of Translational Research at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and postdoctoral fellowship with Dr. Hakon Hakonarson in the Center of Applied Genomics at CHOP. Her postdoctoral work focused on improving diagnosis and treatment for patients with a type of lymphatic disorder called central conducting lymphatic anomaly.

Her accolades include the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Distinguished Research Trainee Award (2019) and the Association for Clinical and Translational Sciences Outstanding Post-Doctoral Trainee Award (2020). In addition to the NIH, her research has been funded by the American Heart Association, the American Society of Transplant Surgeons, the Institute of Translational Medicine and Therapeutics at the University of Pennsylvania, the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, Uplifting Athletes, and the Lymphangiomatosis and Gorham's Disease Alliance.
August Events  
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THURSDAY, AUGUST 18, 1–2:30 PM  
Job Interviewing Workshop  
Led by Public Speaking Coach Scott Morgan

During this session you will learn tips for perfecting the broad interviewing skills needed to secure scientific positions (job talks, chalk talks, and the interview itself) and increasing your comfort level and confidence. You will have the opportunity to analyze expected questions, themes, and dilemmas through interactive exercises and peer review.  
» Tips to help you prepare for your interviews and present yourself professionally  
» Types/examples of questions you can expect  
» Strategies for delivering your best answers  
» Types of questions to ask your interviewers  
» Adapting your interviewing skills to virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic

Participants will also have the opportunity to schedule an individual one-hour coaching session with Scott prior to a scheduled job interview.

Please contact Ms. Katherine Lamb (katherine.lamb@nih.gov) to register. The Zoom link will be provided a few days before the session.