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The NICHD Connection

November 2010

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How I Became a Group Leader: Advice from Andrew Plested, PhD

By Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Dr. Andrew Plested

Do you dream of one day having your own research group? If your answer is yes, it is important to consider the steps required to prepare for, find, and obtain that perfect position. Dr. Andrew Plested, Junior Group Leader at the Leibniz-Institute for Molecular Pharmacology and Assistant Professor at Charité University Hospital in Berlin, spent an afternoon with NICHD fellows to offer his advice about the less obvious aspects of securing a tenure-track position.

"It's not going to work for me the standard way," is the thought that crossed Dr. Plested's mind when two and a half years into his first postdoc he was without a promising project and lacked any first-author publications. Therefore, in 2005 Dr. Plested decided to take action, switching postdoc labs and striving to do everything he could to—in his own words—ameliorate his "ungreatness."

In an effort to navigate in a better direction, Dr. Plested began a new postdoctoral research project at the NICHD, a decision he believes is prudent and critical for any postdoc who is not receiving the guidance, support, or independence required in his or her current research group. In his new environment, things started looking up, and Dr. Plested published a first-author paper within two years. It was at this point that he began to realize the non-obvious part of getting a job: it doesn't take a plethora of *Nature*, *Cell*, or *Science* papers to apply for fellowships and faculty positions.

Eighteen months into his postdoc at the NICHD, with one good publication in hand, Dr. Plested began applying for fellowships and—since he was writing anyway—junior professorships. He explained that a postdoc should never wait! Not all of the positions he applied for were advertised, and many institutes never responded. However his persistence paid off, and eventually he landed a handful of interviews.

(continued on page 2)

Letter from the Editor

I am excited to announce that I will continue to serve as *The NICHD Connection*'s Editor in Chief! My goal will be to maintain a newsletter that provides valuable information about career opportunities, recent workshops, and scientific achievements while keeping all NICHD fellows updated on upcoming events and notable announcements.

As the holiday season approaches, fellows are surely hurrying to knock out a few more experiments before family visits and ultra-feasts, and some fellows may even be wrapping up a few grant or job proposals. Amid the festive chaos, the NICHD abounds with helpful seminars and entertaining social events this month—see pages 3 and 6.

In this issue, we highlight the importance of networking in a scientific career. The Fellows Committee provides excellent networking advice in the Committee Corner column, and *The NICHD Connection* reviews some of the national and local organizations that fellows might like to join. If you missed Dr. Andrew Plested's discussion covering his experience securing a tenure-track position or the seminar about image manipulation for publication, refer to our recaps for a review of the essentials.
As always, we welcome comments, suggestions, or contributions! If you would like to contact *The NICHD Connection*, please send your email to Shana.Spindler@gmail.com

Your Editor in Chief,

Shana R. Spindler, PhD
Shana.Spindler@gmail.com

How I Became a Group Leader

(continued from page 1)

It is important to realize that Dr. Plested did not make this journey alone. Throughout his discussion with NICHD fellows, he emphasized that "you need to get out there" and "exist in people's minds." While at the NICHD, he built a network and broadly interacted with colleagues to learn how his field operates, get hints for jobs, accumulate recommendations for positions, and obtain critical advice on grant proposals and job applications. Dr. Plested stressed that you can't rely on yourself alone, and if you do, you're missing the point about how things operate. This does not mean you need to interact with every passing body in your hallway. In fact, Dr. Plested recommends being selective about your network: choose individuals you can learn from, be analytical, and surround yourself with successful people. Networking also provided an opportunity for Dr. Plested to get comfortable chatting about his research, developed his ability to listen and think, and helped keep him up to date on the field's literature.

Dr. Plested summarized the discussion with a few key points:

- It is possible to obtain a great position without having a large number of groundbreaking papers
- You need to develop a narrative distinct from your mentor's
- You must learn how to discuss your science
- Timing is critical (it took sixteen months from job applications to starting his group leader position)
- Most importantly, you "must not devalue the things you learn when you're not publishing."

Committee Corner

By Jason Riley, PhD and Emily King, PhD

Welcome again to *The NICHD Connection*. This month's newsletter highlights "the other stuff," all of those things that go on a CV that aren't publications, but are perhaps just as important—they show that you are a well-rounded individual. Any fellows who have attended the wonderful workshops about CVs, interviews, and so on have been told how important these things are. In particular, the service part of a CV shows you can multi-task, help your organization, and still be a brilliant scientist.

Yet another activity is also quite important: networking—that elusive beast people always talk about. In this day and age, there will be a mountain of applications for every job; so how do you get your application on top of the pile? In the following true story, our very own committee member Dr. King gives a good example showing that networking can give an application the boost it needs:

> *I was a graduate student mentor at an undergraduate conference. One girl's presentation not only showed that she had a lot of promise but also that her interests would mesh well with my research group's. I tried to recruit her, only to find out that she had applied to my school's graduate program but hadn't heard anything yet. I mentioned her to my advisor, who in turn spoke to the head of the department. It ended up that the girl had a strong application that somehow had escaped notice. She is now a third-year Ph.D. student at my alma mater, but she would have had to settle for a weaker program if she hadn't attended that conference.*

On a final note, the fellows committee sadly has been depleted by departures and workloads. Anyone looking to enhance the service section on their CV by helping out with a newsletter, event organizing, or just maintaining a website for us can please drop me an email at rileyja@mail.nih.gov.

Cheers,
Jason

November Events

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH IN BUILDING 31
Combined Federal Campaign Book & DVD Sale

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 17TH, 12:45 P.M. IN FRONT OF BLDG 50
Fellows lunch outing to Hard Times Cafe
See announcement on page 6 for details!

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15TH, 3-5 P.M.
Job Interviewing, with Scott Morgan
For fellows who are applying for permanent positions this year, this is an interactive session to perfect your presentation skills (job talks, chalk talks, the interview itself). Three spots left!
Register with **Brenda Hanning**, hanningb@mail.nih.gov

Research Ethics Series #1: What's in a Picture with Dr. Kenneth Yamada

By Jason Riley, PhD

This October, the NICHD began its "Research Ethics Series," organized by the stellar Brenda Hanning, with a workshop titled "What's in a picture?" The inaugural session was led by the National Institutes of Health's very own star Dr. Kenneth Yamada of NIDCR. For his credentials—which make some impressive reading—see his CV at: http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/Research/NIDCRLaboratories/CellDevelopmental/KennethYamada.htm

During the workshop, Dr. Yamada discussed a similar subject to his article in *The Catalyst* about image manipulation in scientific publications (http://www.nih.gov/catalyst/2004/04.05.01/index.html), a subject close to his heart as a journal editor. The selection of Dr. Yamada as someone to guide fellows through ethical issues was solidified not only by an incredible publication history as a scientist, but also by his presence on many boards and participation in other such services at the NIH, such as involvement in director-appointing panels. His impressive service record gives you a feel for his well-known integrity.

SOME NUMBERS:

Dr. Yamada opened the session with a few alarming numbers. In one journal's investigation, forensic imaging was used to determine if images had been "fixed." While the journal found that many images were indeed enhanced in a way that did not change the interpretation of the data, 1 percent of the images had been modified to the point of deception. Those manuscripts therefore had to be rejected. If we consider that not all journals complete such a thorough investigation, we can apply the 1 percent image manipulation rate to the eighteen million articles in Pubmed, giving us a quarter of a million deceptive articles. This assumes that forensic imaging can catch all image modifications.

WHAT ARE OUR OBLIGATIONS?

What should we as scientists do? Dr. Yamada continued the workshop with some quick tips: First, we shouldn't cheat by massaging our images. As someone who works in the field of image reconstruction, I can say that I am often skeptical of images that look "too good"' in a paper. Second, when serving as a co-author, we have a responsibility (to the best of our ability) to verify that data isn't deceptive in a manuscript. There will be times when we have to rely on trust, but if the data is in the form of an image, we can ask to see the original. Third, as a reviewer, we can flag suspicious images as something the journal should check with a forensic imager or ask for the original data from the author to validate the image before accepting the article.

THE BOTTOM LINE DOS AND DON'TS:

DO keep all of your original data. DON'T modify an image for publication without recording what you did, and DO explicitly state in your manuscript any image manipulations/enhancements you performed, no matter how trivial. If you state what you did and why you enhanced an image, you are not misleading anyone.

Join the Club – Take Advantage of National and Local Science Societies

By Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Membership in scientific societies is a great way to learn about upcoming conferences, award possibilities, networking opportunities, job postings, and the latest research in a specific field. Postdocs are often offered reduced rate membership fees, which frequently include entry to annual meetings or a subscription to the society's publications. Don't forget, societies can also be a great resource for information about non-academic careers, such as science policy or science writing. We've listed a few societies below that may be of interest to NICHD fellows:

- American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS): http://www.aaas.org
- American Association of Anatomists (AAA): http://www.anatomy.org
- American Physiological Society (APS): http://www.the-aps.org
- American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB): http://www.asbmb.org
- American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB): http://www.ascb.org
- American Society for Investigative Pathology (ASIP): http://www.asip.org
- American Society for Microbiology (ASM): http://www.asm.org
- American Society for Pharmacology and Experimental Therapeutics (ASPET): http://www.aspet.org
- Association for Women in Science (AWIS) http://www.awis.org
- Biophysical Society: http://www.biophysics.org
- Chesapeake Society for Microscopy (CSM): http://www.csmicro.org
- D.C. Science Writers Association (DCSWA): http://www.dcswa.org
- Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB): http://www.faseb.org
- Graduate Women in Science (GWIS): http://www.gwis.org
- Microscopy Society of America (MSA): http://www.microscopy.org
- National Association of Science Writers (NASW): http://www.nasw.org
- Society for Developmental Biology (SDB): http://www.sdbonline.org
- The Society for Mathematical Biology (SMB): http://www.smb.org
- The Society for Neuroscience (SfN): http://www.sfn.org

Don't see your favorite society in this list? Email the society name and URL to Shana.Spindler@gmail.com, and we will be sure to post it in a future newsletter!

Announcements

THE ANNUAL HOLIDAY PARTY ORNAMENT COMPETITION

The annual fellows holiday party is quickly approaching! It's time to put on your creative cap and construct a winning ornament for the yearly ornament competition. Don't forget, all ornaments must be made from your typical laboratory supplies (pipette tips, tubes, petri dishes, tinfoil, etc). For inspiration, have a look at last year's winning entry! ☞

More examples can be found on our website: http://science.nichd.nih.gov/confluence/display/newsletter/2010+Ornament+Competition+Examples

2009 WINNER: Margaret Ochocinska. An aluminum foil mouse with a twist tie red scarf, climbing a strand of DNA pieced together from Eppendorf tubes.

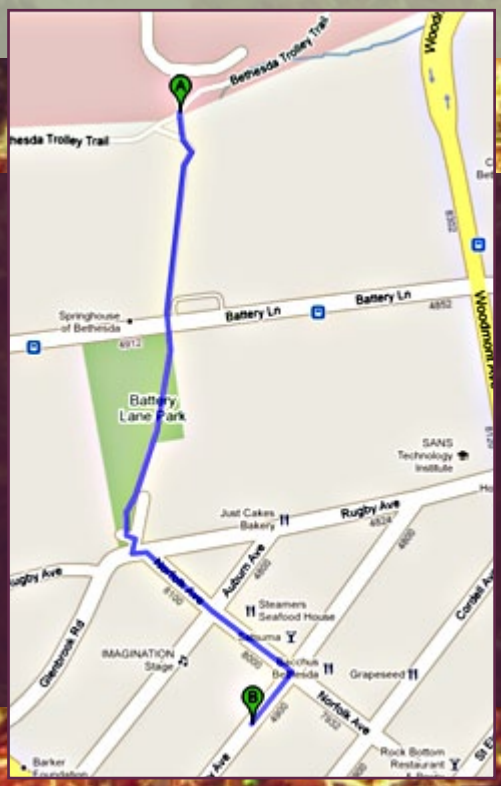
THE 2011 ANNUAL FELLOWS RETREAT

Mark your calendars for the 2011 Fellows Retreat, Monday & Tuesday May 16 and 17.

If you would like to help plan this event, please contact **Kristofor Langlais** at langlaik@mail.nih.gov.

NICHD'S COMMUNITY GARDEN

If you want to get away from the lab for an hour each day in spring and summer, NICHD established a small community garden plot on campus, up towards Natcher. There are several openings for this coming spring. Although you don't have to have cultivated vegetables or flowers before, it's good to know that it takes time and energy to dig, to weed, to plant, and to weed some more. But the outcomes (tomatoes, peppers, zucchini!) are satisfying. If you want to participate for 2011, send a note to Brenda Hanning at hanningb@mail.nih.gov. Depending on the level of interest, we may need to draw names from a hat. If you want to garden with a family member or another fellow outside NICHD, that's fine too, just let Brenda know.



☜ FELLOWS LUNCH OUTING TO HARD TIMES CAFE

November 17 12:45pm

Meet in front of Bldg 50 to walk the Bethesda Trolley Trail to the restaurant (see map at left).

Hard Times Cafe serves 3 types of meat chili and 1 veggie chili. They also have burgers, pasta, and plenty of other options. See you there!

HARD TIMES CAFE

4920 Delray Ave
Bethesda MD 20814