

The NICHD Connection

NIH Resources for Ups, Downs, and Everything in Between

By Shana R. Spindler, PhD

We're only human. We each have moments in our lives when life transitions, workplace conflicts, or anxieties about the future become overwhelming. For many research fellows, it may seem like a successful experiment or one more published paper will alleviate a stressful situation, and so we continue to "deal with it" and push forward. But when is it time to take a step back and talk to someone about your concerns? And who's there to listen?

The NIH has several resources available to employees and fellows who need help dealing with a distressing circumstance, for a variety of issues. Two programs in particular stand out as a first line resource for fellows going through a tough time. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the Office of the Ombudsman provide confidential services for NIH employees and fellows who want to improve their overall well-being or remedy a conflict in the workplace, respectively.

For some, a fear of the unknown prevents them from approaching these resources. Below, you will find basic information about each office, how to know when you should seek support, whom to contact first, what to expect during a consultation, and how to encourage another fellow to utilize a program when needed.

THE EAP AND THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

While each program serves a specific function, it's best to think of them as an integrated support team rather than separate, unaffiliated offices. In some cases, a fellow may want help or advice from multiple programs, as they each specialize in different aspects of conflict and stress management in the workplace.

The Office of the Ombudsman is a terrific resource for fellows who are experiencing a conflict in the lab. According to their [website](#), the Office of the Ombudsman is a "neutral, independent, and confidential resource." They offer several services, including consultation, coaching, mediation, facilitation, and training activities.

The purpose of the Office of the Ombudsman is to reduce disputes and enhance conflict management at the NIH. And they are well practiced. In

May 2015

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EDITOR IN CHIEF

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

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Nichole Swan

PHOTOGRAPHY

Pixabay
Freemages.com
Unsplash
Jeremy Swan (Life Outside Lab photos)

Letter from the Editor

Last month I had the privilege to chat with two individuals at the NIH who care deeply about the health and well-being of our fellow population—and all NIH employees. Eva Chen, senior consultant with the NIH Employee Assistance Program, and Dr. Howard Gadlin, director of the NIH Office of the Ombudsman, shared detailed information about the goals and workings of each program. Check out [this issue's front page](#) to learn about the numerous resources they offer to the NIH family, including stress management during life transitions, short-term counseling, and help with workplace conflicts.

Sometimes the biggest source of stress can stem from uncertainties about the future. To help fellows learn about diverse career opportunities, we've added another installment to our [“Former Fellow Follow-up” column](#): Dr. Mithun Mitra shares his experience becoming an assistant project scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. This is a great option for fellows who enjoy being at the bench and in the thick of research and protocol planning.

We round out the issue with fun Earth Day and Take Your Child to Work Day pictures in our [“Life Outside Lab” column](#) and several exciting [announcements](#) and [events](#)—including the election of our very own Dr. Alan Hinnebusch into the National Academy of Sciences!

Your Editor in Chief,
Shana R. Spindler, PhD

Questions or comments? Please send letters to the editor to Shana.Spindler@gmail.com.

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2009 and 2010, the office handled a combined total of 1,035 cases.¹ If you are experiencing a conflict in lab, you are not alone.

For some fellows, their need for an ombudsman is as simple as a sounding board. “Some people want help in thinking about strategies they might use to handle the situation, especially if they’re looking to handle it in a less adversarial way than they might left on their own,” said Dr. Howard Gadlin, director of the Office of the Ombudsman. “You know, sometimes someone realizes that they’re upset, and they don’t trust their own instincts in terms of the email they’re thinking of sending... Is it really going to be effective to call your boss a son of a...” You get the point.

In some cases, a lab conflict may escalate and become more serious. “There are situations where an EAP Consultant and someone from my office will work together,” Gadlin said. “We might help someone negotiate a complicated work situation while they’re also working with a consultant from EAP to handle the anxiety or stress they’re feeling around the situation.”

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 well-being in a confidential and neutral manner. All EAP staff are licensed mental health professionals who possess a unique administrative, organizational, and clinical skillset. They provide coping mechanisms for difficult times and counsel fellows to help make life transitions easier. “If anyone has any concerns—it doesn’t necessarily just have to be mental health concerns. Sometimes fellows who come from a foreign country or are brand new to NIH have anxieties associated with being in a new place,” said Eva Chen, Lead – Senior EAP consultant.

“Every one of us goes through different chapters of our lives, and we want to provide guidance and recommendations, and even some strategies, to help people get through different stages. Even something as happy as getting married or starting a new job can cause stress,” Chen said.

EAP uses a validated and scientific measurement tool called Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS), used by over 400 EAPs worldwide to help EAPs better evaluate the impact of EAP intervention on work performance and overall well-being. Between October 2011 and June 2014, data showed favorable results in the following (N=354): 1) A reduction in presenteeism (attending work while sick or beyond the amount needed for effective

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performance); 2) An increase in life satisfaction; and 3) A reduction in workplace distress.²

The EAP hosts an array of services such as short-term counseling, consultation, coaching, supervisory consultation, crisis intervention, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and training. The types of concerns EAP addresses are the following: life transitions, work/life balance, working effectively, mental health, addictions, grief and loss, crisis intervention, supervisory resources, and health and wellness. A detailed breakdown for each service can be found on the [EAP website](#).

WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT

It's completely normal to need guidance with life's many ups and downs. Consider this analogy: a PI is to your research career as the EAP and Ombudsman offices are to your health and well-being. Just as you wouldn't wait until you have a major problem with your research project to approach your PI, you wouldn't want to wait until you are in a crisis situation to approach one of these support offices.

"From my perspective, most situations, the earlier you try to address them, the more amenable to resolution they are," Gadlin said. "If it's something that's upsetting enough that you're thinking 'I might need some help with this,' that's sufficient reason to call."

According to both Chen and Gadlin, while it's best to utilize these resources when a problem first arises, rather than in a state of crisis, anytime is a good time to seek support—even if it's just to chat with a consultant about different ways to approach a problem. There is never an invalid reason to call upon the assistance of the EAP or Ombudsman consultants. If they feel another program will better suit your situation, they will help you find the support you need.

WHOM TO CONTACT FIRST

"[Fellows] shouldn't worry too much about whom to contact first... The programs are complementary, one to the other" Gadlin said. But, if you feel a bit intimidated about calling the right person, a good place to start for lab conflicts is the Office of the Ombudsman. For issues regarding stress management, health and well-being, coping with life transitions, and other mental health issues, the EAP is an

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excellent starting point. For both the Ombudsman Office and the EAP, a fellow can initiate contact by calling, emailing, or stopping by the office in person (please refer to the end of the article for contact information).

A third option, the NIH Civil Program, is aimed at preventing violence in the NIH workplace. If you are experiencing a concerning situation involving violence, need assistance with the aftermath of violence, or need help with your own behaviors, Civil coordinators can offer appropriate assistance. "The Civil Coordinator will assess the urgency of the situation and coordinate a response with the most appropriate NIH resources," said Jessica Hawkins, Civil consultant. "However, [Civil] is not intended to be used as a substitute for calling 911 when an individual feels police or emergency help is needed."

WHAT TO EXPECT

In general, the sequence of events when seeking support from EAP or the Office of the Ombudsman is an initial phone call, assignment to a consultant, and then a one-on-one, in-person meeting (in building 31) to discuss your concerns. In the case of

the EAP and Ombudsman office, all of the conversations and meetings are in complete confidence, unless there is an immediate threat to yourself or others. If this is the case, appropriate steps will be taken to ensure your and others' safety.

In a meeting with an ombudsman, there is no commitment by coming to the meeting to follow up or pursue any course of action. In Dr. Gadlin's experience, some people want to talk about a situation to learn about avenues that are available to them to address a problem. In those cases, learning about different options satisfies the person and no other actions on the part of the Ombudsman are taken. In other scenarios, follow-up sessions or conflict remediation may take place.

The EAP follows a six-session model for short-term counseling. After a fellow contacts the EAP office, he or she will be assigned to an EAP consultant for an initial in-person consultation, usually within three business days, after a brief phone triage. In the first session, the EAP consultant carefully assesses the situation and together with the fellow develops a plan (each session is usually about an hour long). If a

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fellows needs long-term support, the EAP consultant would provide referral to the appropriate community resources.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE ELSE

According to Chen, if you know someone at the NIH who is struggling with stress or a life transition, empathize with this person and defer to the EAP Consultants for support. In a private space, confide that you notice they have been under a lot of stress based on their recent behaviors. Explain that you know of the NIH EAP, a service to help with things like life transitions or work/life balance. Offer to make a phone call together to the EAP consultants; even find a quiet room to put your phone on speaker, introduce yourself, and then let the EAP consultant know that you have a friend who might benefit from their program. Sometimes it helps to have a lab mate get the ball rolling to eliminate the fear or stigma associated with seeking help. Hearing a friendly voice on the end of the line also may ease anxiety.

If you or someone you know needs a little extra assistance, the EAP and the Office of the Ombudsman are valuable resources for all NIH employees and fellows. While they are only two of many support programs at the NIH, they are an excellent starting point for making your time here happy, healthy, and productive.

REFERENCES

1. Center for Cooperative Resolution Biennial Report 2010. NIH Office of the Ombudsman.
2. Workplace Outcome Suite – Summary of Cumulative Results 2014. NIH Employee Assistance Program.

Contact Information

THE NIH EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

Building 31, Room B2B57

Phone: 301-496-3164

E-mail a particular EAP Staff Member: http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/EAP/Pages/eap_consultants.aspx

Website: <http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/EAP/Pages/index.aspx>

EAP brochure: <http://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/Documents/NIH-EmpAssistPrgrm-508.pdf>

THE NIH OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Center for Cooperative Resolution

Building 31, Room 2B63

Phone: 301-594-7231

Email Dr. Howard Gadlin: GadlinH@od.nih.gov

Website: <http://ombudsman.nih.gov>

Ombudsman brochure: <http://ombudsman.nih.gov/NIH%20Ombudsman%20Brochure.pdf>

THE NIH CIVIL PROGRAM

Phone: 301-40C-IVIL (301-402-4845)

Website: <http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/civil/>

Civil brochure: <http://hr.od.nih.gov/hrguidance/civil/documents/trifold.pdf>

Former Fellow Follow-up with Dr. Mithun Mitra, Assistant Project Scientist

This month, we're catching up with Dr. Mithun Mitra, assistant project scientist at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Mitra served as an NIH visiting fellow in the lab of Dr. Judith Levin from May 2008 until January 2014. His NICHD research focused on the nucleic acid binding and enzymatic properties of the human APOBEC3 family of host defense proteins. Read below to learn more about being an assistant project scientist at a large research university:



Can you tell us a little about your new position as an assistant project scientist?

I am an assistant project scientist in the lab of Dr. Hilary Collier at UCLA. I joined UCLA in February 2014. The research in the lab is focused on studying cell quiescence, which is a state of reversible cell cycle exit. We want to know how a quiescent cell is different from a normal proliferating cell. This would provide clues to better understand cancer, where cells divide in an uncontrolled manner. My project is to study the role of alternative polyadenylation in cell quiescence and cancer.

The responsibilities include:

1. Performing experiments and doing analysis
2. Presenting the research work in group meetings, intramural meetings, and conferences
3. Writing manuscripts
4. Assisting in the preparation of grants
5. Maintaining the inventory of cell lines
6. Coordinating with core laboratories in the campus for instrument or analysis software use
7. Writing lab protocols.

How is an assistant project scientist different or similar to the roles of a postdoc, a staff scientist, and a PI?

The role is similar to that of a staff scientist.

What's your typical day like?

A typical day includes setting up and performing experiments, briefing my adviser about the experimental plans, doing data analysis, discussing a protocol or results with my colleagues, working on a manuscript, and attending a lunch seminar. I am

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new to the cancer field, and so attending lunch seminars conducted by the Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center at UCLA is a great way to learn about recent developments in cancer research. I am involved in collaborative projects and so have to communicate with other project members regarding results and experimental outlines.

Is this position a long-term, permanent position or temporary? If temporary, what is the typical next step after being a project scientist?

The position has to be renewed every one or two years. Depending upon the performance and level of funding, one can move up the ranks to become Associate Project Scientist and then Project Scientist.

More details here: <https://www.apo.ucla.edu/policies/the-call/appendices-1/appendix-36-project-e.g.-scientist-series>

What do you find exciting about being an assistant project scientist? Do you find anything challenging?

I get to work with a great research team and also learn and apply new experimental techniques. This position has a big research component and there is no requirement for teaching. This allows me to devote a lot of my time to research. There is a wonderful collaboration here in UCLA between basic science, computational, and clinical researchers. This allows me to consider a multi-pronged approach to solve problems in hand.

Being new to the cancer field, I have to spend some time getting acquainted with new techniques and protocols and to do troubleshooting. But, I am learning a lot along the way.

When did you start thinking about joining another lab after postdoc?

I started thinking about applying to a new position about a year before my appointment at NIH was about to end.

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Former Fellow Follow-up with Dr. Mithun Mitra

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How did you find your current position in Dr. Collier's lab at UCLA?

When I started working on APOBEC3 proteins, it was considered to be a family of antiviral proteins. Later, it was shown that two family members, APOBEC3A and APOBEC3B, are the sources of mutations in many cancers. This is because these DNA mutator proteins could target genomic DNA due to their nuclear localization. This got me really interested in cancer and genomics research. I came across the website of Dr. Collier's lab and found her work very interesting. I wrote an email to her to inquire about any open research positions. She told me that she just moved from Princeton University to UCLA and that she was hiring new lab personnel.

Please describe the application/hiring process. Did it take a long time?

The interview was done on Skype. Then, I had to send all the documents including recommendation letters. After that, it took about two months to get the official job offer letter. The processing timing could be affected due to the holidays in November. The entire process was quite smooth. After I got the letter, I had to apply for the J-1 waiver and H-1B visa. I am very thankful to DIS [Division of International Services] and NICHD

administrative offices for all their help during the waiver process.

Which skill sets from the lab best apply to becoming an assistant project scientist?

A doctoral degree is a must for applying to this position. The specific skill set depends on the lab one is applying to. I was fortunate to move to a new field. I learned lots of new things related to cancer research after joining UCLA. There are basic research skills that are applicable to any field of research and one can learn specific techniques while working on the project. It's wonderful to have people with different backgrounds in a research team as we can learn from each other and at the same time can look at the problem from a unique perspective, which is very helpful. I had a wonderful research experience at NIH and it is helping me a lot in my current research.

What activities or resources at the NIH helped prepare you for your career transition?

I attended several career workshops at NIH and they were really helpful. I am very thankful to Brenda Hanning and Yvette Pittman for organizing these activities for the fellows. I was also able to take several courses at FAES graduate school including courses related to public health (like statistics and

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Former Fellow Follow-up with Dr. Mithun Mitra (continued from page 9)

epidemiology) and bioinformatics. I am currently using a lot of what I learned from these courses in my current research. I strongly advise fellows to consider taking a few courses in statistics and bioinformatics, as they are highly applicable in most of the research fields. Also, “data science” is gaining prominence. The NIH library also conducts several bioinformatics courses and they are very useful. I also participated in the Translational Science Training Program conducted by OITE and NCATS, and that was great because it allowed me to write a cancer-related research proposal and to learn about the translational science field.

Do you have any advice for postdoctoral fellows who are thinking about a similar next step?

I would advise fellows to think ahead about their future goals and what they would like to achieve during their stay at NIH. It is very important to do good research and publish, and NIH provides a wonderful research environment to do that. At the same time, NIH has great resources to learn and improve career-related skills and also to learn new research topics and computational techniques through FAES graduate school and the NIH library. I would also advise fellows to write grant proposals and present their research work. There is a lot to do, but time is limited and so planning is key.

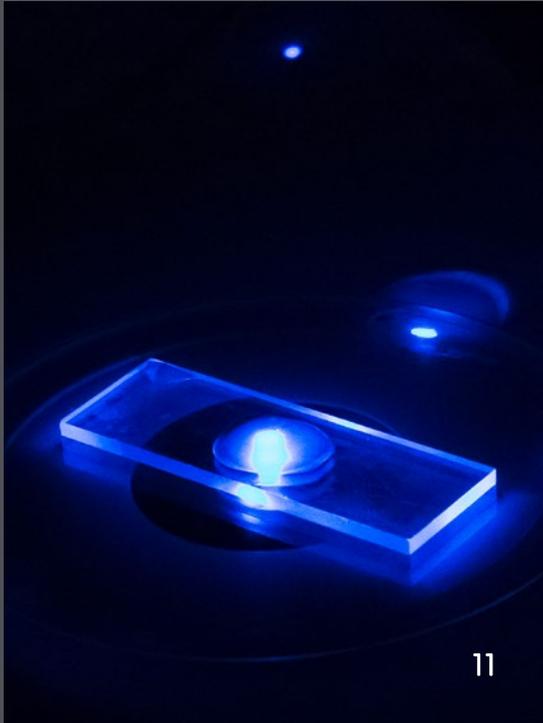
Is it ok if current NICHD fellows contact you with questions?

I would be very happy to answer any questions. You can contact me at mmitra@ucla.edu.



Life Outside Lab

20th Annual
NIH Take Your Child
to Work Day
& Earth Day Festivities
THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 2015
(more photos online)







May Announcements

ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL ANNUAL NICHD FELLOWS MEETING

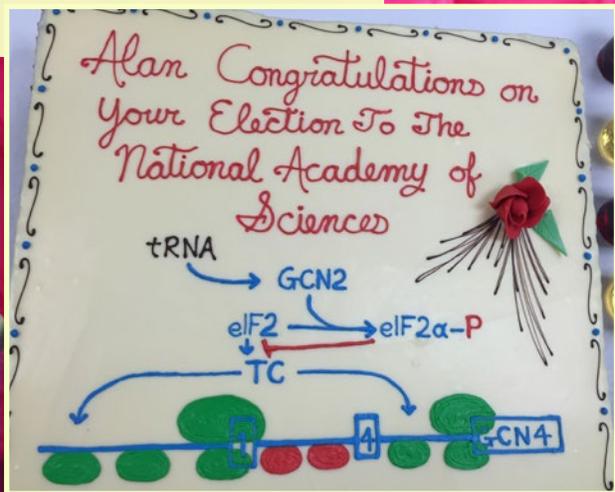
Thank you to all NICHD fellows for making the Eleventh Annual Meeting of Postdoctoral, Clinical, and Visiting Fellows, and Graduate Students a success. Check back for the three most common questions and answers from each of the meeting's Career Round Table discussions in the upcoming June issue. We will also publish a full recap of the retreat's keynote and fellow presentations in July. Stay tuned!



DR. ALAN HINNEBUSCH ELECTED INTO THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

Please join *The NICHD Connection* in congratulating Dr. Hinnebusch on this significant achievement. Dr. Hinnebusch heads the Section on Nutrient Control of Gene Expression, where his lab studies “the regulation of amino acid and vitamin biosynthetic genes in budding yeast as a means of dissecting mechanisms of translational and transcriptional control of gene expression.” To learn more about his work, please visit his lab website at <https://science.nichd.nih.gov/confluence/display/pcrm/Alan+Hinnebusch>.

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May Announcements (continued from page 14)

SAVE THE DATE! SUMMER GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP

“Write Winning NIH Grant Proposals”

9:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

July 14, 2015

This workshop will address both practical and conceptual aspects that are important to the proposal writing process. Attendees will receive the “Grant Writer’s Workbook” – an invaluable, up-to-date reference tool for those who intend to write NIH grant proposals. It includes various topics, from how to prepare a compelling Specific Aims page to insights into which review criteria are most important.

If you would like to register, please email Yvette Pittman at yvette.pittman@nih.gov.

There are only 25 slots for NICHD fellows.

THE NIH BIOETHICS INTEREST GROUP REQUESTS YOUR INPUT (<http://sigs.nih.gov/bioethics/Pages/default.aspx>)

The Bioethics Interest Group has been meeting since 1997 and has discussed a wide range of topics. We have talked about ethical issues in research and emerging areas of science. We typically have a speaker, but leave plenty of time for discussion. Our participants come from a variety of NIH Institutes and from outside NIH. Some are interested in specific areas, e.g., neuroscience, international research or public health emergencies, and others in bioethics generally. Some attend all or most meetings; some come only when they are interested in the particular topic.

The group is starting to plan for next fall and is seeking input from the NIH community. We want to know:

1. Are you interested in participating in the group?
2. What specific topics or general areas would you like the group to discuss next year?

Please respond to Miriam Keltym, at keltym@mail.nih.gov. We hope to hear from you.

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May Announcements (continued from page 15)

FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR KOREAN POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

Under a bilateral partnership between NIH and the Korea Health Industry Development Institute (KHIDI), the 2015 Postdoctoral Researcher Fellowship call for applications is now opened. This is the third year of the Fellowship.

The Korean Visiting Scientist Training Award (KVSTA) Fellowship provides a two-year stipend to Korean postdoctoral researchers who currently are undertaking or will undertake postdoctoral research at an NIH intramural lab. Research training fields include all fields related to biomedical and behavioral research at NIH. Applicants must meet all the following criteria:

1. Be a Korean citizen or permanent resident of Korea
2. Received at least one degree at a Korea University
3. Obtained a doctoral degree, equivalent to a Ph.D., within the previous five years as of December 1, 2015
4. Meet the eligibility requirements for NIH's Intramural Visiting Fellow Program*

Applications are submitted directly to KHIDI and reviewed by a scientific panel composed of senior Korean scientists. Up to eight (8) Fellowships, but possibly fewer depending on application quality and funding availability, will be awarded by KHIDI. As part of the application package, the applicant must submit a recommendation letter from the applicant's sponsoring NIH lab host/mentor**. Application deadline is JUNE 17, 2015.

*KVSTA Fellows are to be designated as Supplemental VF and adhere to its requirements. NIH policies on postdoctoral fellowship duration and notification of termination must be followed. Applicants must also be eligible to enter the United States under the J-1 Exchange Visitor visa classification. Information about United States entry requirements will be provided to those applicants selected for the Fellowship.

**NIH host/mentor must be an intramural NIH PI whose appointment was approved by the Deputy Director for Intramural Research.

For further information about the 2015 KVSTA Fellowship, please visit: <http://www.fic.nih.gov/Programs/Pages/korea-visiting-scientists.aspx>.

Direct Inquiries to:
Tina Chung, MPH, Program Officer
Fogarty International Center
Phone: (301) 496-4784
Email: Tina.Chung@nih.gov

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May Announcements

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NEW BIOSKETCH REQUIREMENTS FOR NIH GRANTS

A new, **modified biosketch** format is required for all NIH grant applications due on or after May 25, 2015. To learn more about this requirement, consider listening to the NIH Biosketch and SciENCv (the Science Experts Network Curriculum Vitae tool) informational **podcasts**, available in mp3 or transcript format.

May Events

MONDAY, MAY 11, 3 – 5 PM

NICHD Exchange Quarterly Meeting
Building 6100, Room 5A01

“Unique Challenges of Conducting Clinical Trials in Vulnerable Populations”

Vulnerable populations are characterized in many ways ranging from their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, developmental stage, to health status. Disparities in services, resources, and health outcomes are often associated with these groups as well as specific risks for harm. Much more research is needed to understand the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the health and well-being of vulnerable populations or that place them at risk for poor outcomes. However, many barriers exist to conducting research including challenges in participant recruitment, patient distrust of research, lack of confidentiality, fear of safety, schedule conflicts, poor access to medical care, lack of knowledge, language, and cultural differences to name a few! Join us to learn how more about the unique challenges of conducting clinical trials in this population and successful strategies for overcoming barriers.

Valerie Maholmes: Unique challenges of conducting clinical trials in vulnerable populations

Anne Zajicek: Innovative trial designs? Phase 1-2 trial designs in neonates

Uma Reddy: Clinical trials in pregnancy

Jack Yanovski: Pediatric and adolescent obesity

Denny Porter: Development of 2-Hydroxypropyl-B-cyclodextrin therapy for Niemann-Pick Disease, type C1



NICHD EXCHANGE

UNIQUE CHALLENGES OF CLINICAL TRIALS IN *vulnerable populations*

MONDAY, MAY 11, 2015
3:00-5:00 P.M.
BUILDING 6100
ROOM 5A01

Valerie Maholmes
Unique Challenges of Clinical Trials in Vulnerable Populations

Anne Zajicek
Innovative trial designs? Phase 1-2 trial designs in neonates

Uma Reddy
Clinical Trials in Pregnancy

Jack Yanovski
Pediatric and Adolescent Obesity

Denny Porter
Development of 2-Hydroxypropyl-B-cyclodextrin therapy for Niemann-Pick Disease, type C1

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

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May Events

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FRIDAY, MAY 29, 10 – 11:30 AM

For All New Fellows: NICHD Postdoc Orientation
Room 2A48, building 31

What unique opportunities are available to you at the NICHD? You can learn the answer at our quarterly NICHD postdoc orientation. This orientation is separate from all of the other orientations, and it supplements the NIH-wide Office of Intramural Training and Education session. If you recently joined an intramural NICHD lab as a postdoc or visiting fellow, please plan to attend this NICHD-specific event.

Led by the NICHD Office of Education, the orientation will highlight both NICHD and NIH-wide intramural resources for postdoc fellows. Topics will include career-planning tools, grant opportunities for fellows, ideas for presenting your science locally, and the core facilities available to you. You will have the opportunity to meet fellows from other research areas and in different buildings. And we will share information on our key programs that support your professional development, complementing the mentored experience you will have at the bench.