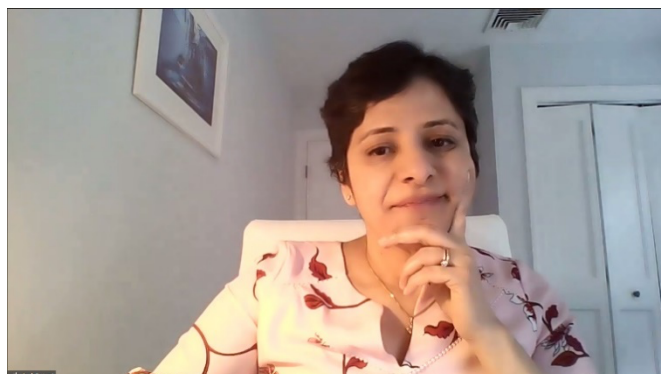


Panel discussion: Careers in the non-profit sector March 31, 2021

Summary by Jean Royce Gatdula and Elizabeth Yvonne Flores



Panelists: (pictured left to right)

Dr. Larry Luchsinger; Principal Investigator, Assistant Member at New York Blood Center

Dr. Shefali Soni; Program Officer, Crohn's Disease at The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust

Dr. Barbara Schreiber; BUSM Associate Professor of Biochemistry (Moderator)

The goal of Boston University's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BU's BEST) is to expose trainees to a variety of biomedical career paths. Professional careers in the non-profit sector were given a spotlight on the 31st of March. Trainees were given a chance to meet with BU GMS alumni in a panel discussion led by Dr. Barbara Schreiber, Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) Associate Professor of Biochemistry. During the panel discussion, Dr. Larry Luchsinger, Principal Investigator, and Assistant Member at New York Blood Center, and Dr. Shefali Soni, Program Officer of Crohn's Disease at The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, discussed their interesting paths from "learning the ropes" in graduate school to working as esteemed professionals in their chosen fields. Both of the panelists shared their journeys and their insights in navigating and succeeding through graduate school, using opportunities to leverage connections in the future!

Dr. Larry Luchsinger earned a BS in Chemistry at Marquette University, MA in Chemistry at BU and a PhD in Biochemistry at BUSM where he studied the regulation of collagen biosynthesis under the direction of Dr. Barbara Smith. He did postdoctoral training at Columbia University and received a postdoctoral fellowship from the The New York Stem Cell Foundation, where he studied hematopoietic stem cell function. He was recruited to his current role, where he enjoys wearing many different hats. He has always envisioned himself running a lab in the future and that's what he does in the New York Blood Center. Dr Luchsinger promotes the funding of regenerative medicine cellular based cell therapies, manages, and hires lab members and applies for funding. He is at the forefront of creating new science and it is obvious that he enjoys being involved in every process of running a lab. The New York Blood Center is the 3RD largest blood bank in the US and the NY branch is the only one with an independent institute for basic research labs; one of the pillars of the blood center is its commitment to basic science. A big

concern for Dr. Luchsinger is funding. As a nonprofit, the New York Blood Center secures endowments for basic science research and its application in medicine. His advice to trainees wanting to pursue non-profit careers is to be honest with yourself and consider what you want to do. One of the pitfalls of many PhD students is following a trail that doesn't excite them to their core. Imposter syndrome has always been a dilemma for PhD trainees because they end up living up to a standard set by other people. However, Dr. Luchsinger advised that training for a PhD is not merely seeking validation from your lab but it is a time for discovering your own "brand" in the science community.

When asked what skills are particularly useful for people looking into his career path, he mentioned that having a solid foundation in hard skills in science, being diligent, and forging relationships early in your scientific career is a must. Most incoming graduate students would often think that they are alone at the face of adversity, but as Dr. Luchsinger mentioned, science is more communication than you can possibly imagine. It is important to grow as an excellent scientist but having meaningful lifelong relationships with people within or even outside of the lab is critical. In your PhD training, the academic environment around you is your oyster and you must seize every opportunity to learn from them and use them to expand the knowledge of your chosen field.

Dr. Shefali Soni earned a BSc in Biochemistry at Delhi University, an MSc in Biochemistry at Panjab University and she came to the United States in 2001 to earn her PhD in Biochemistry at BUSM, working in deciphering mechanisms in breast cancer resistance under the direction of Dr. Kathrin Kirsch. She did her postdoctoral work at Mount Sinai School of Medicine and studied red blood cell development until she asked herself if she should continue after nearly 6 years in the lab. She decided to consider job opportunities other than those in academia; ultimately, she joined the non-profit organization The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. She said it's difficult to break into the non-profit sector and like most, she started in an entry level position in the Crohn's Disease program. She has since been promoted to her current role. Her job is to identify scientists interested in Crohn's disease with the hope of funding their science. She explained that there are a lot of scouting opportunities within the job with the objective of knowing what is happening now in the scientific field so as to determine who they want to fund. She was then asked what her favorite thing is about her job. Dr. Soni said she likes the job "because I am [she is] pretty much involved with the researchers and it is always interesting to be connected with the science in the forefront of it but not actually doing it."

When asked what her advice would be to students, Dr. Soni recommends that they put thought into what they want to do and what path they would like to take. The road in science for everyone is not a linear path at all. Creating your own path requires you to take risks, communicate with different types of people, and learn to forge your own road to success. For starting professionals, Dr. Soni's suggestion is to write down what you like and don't like on a whiteboard and begin to talk to a lot of people. She elaborated that in order to be successful in the non-profit sector, you have to have people skills and communication skills because the work requires not only independently managing projects but also working with people including those from different backgrounds and cultures.

At the end of the panel discussion, it was apparent that Dr. Soni and Dr Luchsinger had taken different paths, and both provided great insights for those considering their career trajectories. It was refreshing to hear their stories, leaving the audience with a lot to think about. A brink of

hope into a new dawn of tomorrow; with the help of our panelists and the goal of BU's BEST, fellow graduate students and young professionals can aspire to reach other summits to realize their professional goals.