

FC708 Professional Development Skills

Panel discussion: Careers in science communication & law

April 13, 2022

The training for biomedical PhD students conjures mastery of research. Therefore, students may not consider pursuing career paths focused in science communication or law but in fact, many of the skills gained during the Ph.D. training are transferable, thereby enabling scientists to move into these careers. The science communication and law panel discussion, organized by Boston University's Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training (BU's BEST), introduced students to these fields and provided them with details on the desirable qualities necessary for successful careers. The panelists were BU Graduate Medical Science (GMS) alumni including two medical writers; **Dr. Samantha Hiemer** (GMS'16), Manager with Alkermes Inc., and **Dr. Connie Milan** (GMS'15), Associate Director of Medical Writing with Takeda, and an attorney; **Dr. Christopher Sullivan** (GMS'09), Senior Patent Attorney with Adimab LLC. **Dr. Barbara Schreiber** (GRS'81), Associate Professor of Biochemistry, hosted the discussion. Panelists discussed what a successful career looks like, highlighting the importance of expanding one's network, obtaining early experiences to gain critical skills, and of maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

Being more senior in their careers, the panelists primarily execute daily managerial tasks rather than perform technical work such as writing documents or assessing the integrity of their records. Project management and effective communication were popular soft skills asserted by all panelists. However, earlier in their careers, they relied heavily on strong writing skills and their proficiency in distilling experimental results into the appropriate level of detail. Dr. Hiemer and Dr. Milan stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining effective collaborations with others as the nature of medical writing depends on external expertise. As Dr. Sullivan pointed out, those interested in entry-level opportunities must also be proficient in communicating with other scientists about their data. To build a strong network and expand the potential for opportunity, Dr. Milan expressed the importance of communicating any professional interests to as many people as possible, within and outside of the workplace. Dr. Hiemer advises not to be afraid to ask for help and to conduct informational interviews to explore options. Dr. Sullivan explained the roles a Ph.D. trained scientist can secure in the law sector, including a technical specialist, a patent agent as well as an attorney. He advised trainees to take every opportunity to teach/tutor and explain your science to others.

Obtaining experience in medical writing and intellectual property during Ph.D. training is critical to finding an entry-level position in these fields. While it is possible to enter the space without direct experience, this is a rarity even for those with doctoral degrees. The nature of the work can differ from academia in that it operates at a faster pace and fosters the expectation of constant collaboration, so gaining experience in writing and law can help bridge any gaps in culture and company-lifestyle adjustment. There are multiple opportunities to enable a Ph.D. student to gain early experience e.g. participating in BU Technology Development (OTD) which has a program for doctoral

students to gain experience with commercialization of technology; writing abstracts and manuscripts; taking online courses that explain common lingo and abbreviations used ubiquitously in these fields.

Another common discussion topic surrounded work-life balance. Dr. Sullivan explained that a law firm is required to serve their customers whenever they are needed and as a result, the type of firm can have a major impact on work-life balance. For in-house counsel lawyers, this balance is more favorable because the internal needs of the company are well-scheduled and defined as opposed to those addressed by outside counsel. A medical writing career offers work-from-home flexibility and allows managers to establish and better maintain on/off-hour boundaries. All panelists agreed that better work-life balance quickly followed as they become more senior in their line of work.

The science communication and law career panel offered by BU's BEST provided insight behind biomedical careers for those interested in these career paths. The three guests generously gave their time and effort in explaining the broad array of opportunities provided through these career paths. Students left the discussion with a detailed perspective on these career options and how to best explore them.

All of the panelists have graciously agreed to distribution of their emails so trainees can follow up with them; Dr. Hiemer (shiemer88@gmail.com), Dr. Milan (connie.milan@takeda.com) and Dr. Sullivan (sullivan95@gmail.com).

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