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Peer to Peer: Invest In Your Own Future

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This occasional series offers first-person experiences and peer advice from your fellow gastroenterology trainees. Those interested in contributing an article may forward their submission via e-mail to communications@gastro.org.

The only person who knows exactly how to sculpt your career is you. Although those around you truly may have your best interest in mind, at the end of the day, it is you who has to walk the career path that you ultimately choose to follow. Choosing this path is not always easy, and it is certainly not an overnight process.

As a first year fellow, I attended an AGA conference for fellows interested in academic medicine. I suppose I ended up at that conference because I thought that a career in academics was a possibility, but at the time I remember thinking that it was hard to pass up a free trip away from my pager for a few days. A dynamic speaker from the Mayo Clinic, Dr. Yvonne Romero, first triggered serious consideration towards academic medicine. She commented that if you have a passion in a particular niche of gastroenterology, you should feed off of that enthusiasm and develop as much expertise in that field as possible.

Having an interest in inflammatory bowel disease, I made my next stop the Mentoring in Inflammatory Bowel Disease conference at the Annenberg Center in Palm Springs. At that conference, I asked as many of the faculty as possible about their careers and how they spend their week. Thinking of how I can spend some more time with these experts, I inquired about spending a month or two at their respective institutions. Without exception, they all agreed to have me come, and I left for the Palm Springs airport feeling that I had been successful in moving things along. Then, without forewarning, I found myself on a two-hour layover in Houston with one of the mentors of the program. At first I was a little nervous to approach Dr. Bruce Sands who was on his way back to Massachusetts General Hospital, but after discussing a patient I had previously referred to him, the conversation turned towards how I could advance my career. To make a long story short, with some aggressive pursuit, I became the first IBD clinical research fellow at Massachusetts General Hospital, a year-long position that I completed this month.

Looking for more doors to open, I applied for and was fortunate to be accepted into the AGA-Abbott Immunology Investing in the Future program this May during DDW in Chicago. This was an opportunity to be paired with an IBD mentor (I was lucky to

draw Dr. David Rubin from the University of Chicago), and meet and learn from not only the mentors, but also co-fellows who are interested in a similar career. My sense was that the academic community is welcoming to enthusiastic young physicians who are passionate about their field.

Four lessons that I have learned so far stand out and will hopefully be helpful to others:

- People will be willing to invest in your future if you show that you are willing to invest in yourself
- Opportunities are all around us – the key is recognizing the opportunity and taking advantage of the moment
- Follow your instincts and go after your goals, because you are the only one who truly knows what is right for you
- Be patient in identifying these goals – it is a process, not an epiphany

This summer, I begin as the Director of the Inflammatory Bowel Disease Center at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, NH. I am not certain where my career path will ultimately lead, but I feel confident that I have done everything in my power to obtain the tools necessary to provide opportunity for the future. I encourage you to think about what you want at the end of your ten plus years of training, and go after it, because it is unlikely that it will come find you.