

NIEHS celebrates National Postdoc Appreciation Week

By Heather Franco

NIEHS celebrated its postdoctoral fellows Sept. 20 with a day full of events, including a general assembly meeting, a trivia contest, and a picnic. Fellows also had a chance to pick up career and professional development books, provided by the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, throughout the week.

Tammy Collins, Ph.D., director of the NIEHS [Office of Fellows' Career Development](#) (OFCD), explained, "This celebration is our way of saying thank you for the excellent scientific research carried out by the fellows and for their contributions to the NIEHS community."

The celebration was part of [National Postdoc Appreciation Week](#) (<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/meetings-and-events-4/appreciation>) Sept. 16- 20 sponsored by the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). NIEHS is a sustaining member of NPA.

Birnbaum fields postdoc questions

NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., opened the meeting by extending her open door policy and answering the fellows' questions. She covered topics ranging from IT contracts to the [NIEHS strategic plan](#).

According to Birnbaum, the strategic plan lays out some key areas for the future of environmental research. It contains 8 overarching themes, 11 goals, and 8 NIEHS cross-divisional implementation groups.

"These areas have lots of parts, and lots of people at the Institute are already interested in them," explained Birnbaum.

She also highlighted the effects of early life exposures on long-term health, the concept of multiple exposures, and the science of the microbiome, as hot areas in environmental health research.

New career development opportunities

The meeting continued with Collins and Tracy Clement, Ph.D., of the NIEHS [Gamete Biology Group](#), outlining new career development programs for NIEHS fellows. The OFCD provides fellows with the necessary skills and career development opportunities for future careers. It hosts a number of events ranging from workshops, to courses, to networking events. This year, Collins is beginning a program called Scientific Career Tracks.

"The objective of the program is to raise awareness of what the available careers are, and to provide real knowledge of what getting into those careers entails," Collins said.



Birnbaum answered questions about events happening at NIEHS, and the future of environmental research. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Before Collins took over as director of the OFCD, she was a postdoc in the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Genetics, working with William Copeland, Ph.D., head of the Mitochondrial DNA Replication Group. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Goldsmith is an Intramural Research Training Award fellow in the NIEHS Biomolecular Screening Branch. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Collins plans to form a committee of volunteers that will work on the program, to provide a framework for career planning and create a central hub of career resources.

Complementing this program, Clement has developed a program called Enhancing Local Industry Transitions Through Exploration (ELITE), which is modeled in part from the Postdoc Industry Exploration Program founded at the University of California, Berkeley.

"The goal of the program is to help NIEHS fellows explore industry careers through on-site visits," said Clement. "On these visits, fellows can learn about careers in industry, and network with industry scientists."

Ways for NIEHS postdocs to get involved

Rachel Goldsmith, Ph.D., the new [NIEHS Trainees Assembly](#) (NTA) president, ended the meeting by describing the activities of the assembly. The NTA, led by a steering committee of volunteers, represents the trainees to the NIEHS administration, as well as national and state committees; works with the OFCD to plan career development activities; and plans social events, such as the Fellows' Coffee Hour.

The OFCD and NTA also arranged a trivia competition following the general assembly meeting. Ten teams participated in a lively competition that has become a tradition among NIEHS fellows.

After trivia, postdocs and their families enjoyed a picnic sponsored by NIEHS lead researchers. It was a great way to end the day's celebration.

(Heather Franco, Ph.D., is an Intramural Research Training Award fellow in the NIEHS Laboratory of Reproductive and Developmental Toxicology.)



Raja Jothi, Ph.D., of the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis, right, and his postdocs Senthilkumar Cinghu, Ph.D., left, and Andrew Oldfield, Ph.D., work together to answer a question during the trivia contest. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



The Institute celebrated all of its postdoctoral fellows as part of National Postdoc Appreciation Week. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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