

NIEHS fellow launches a career in science administration

By Aleksandra Adomas

Ashley Godfrey, Ph.D., completed her four-year postdoctoral training in the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis and, in May, joined the Duke Cancer Institute as a scientific review officer. In her new role, Godfrey will review oncology clinical research protocols, involving human subjects, for scientific merit and appropriateness.

Clinical research interest

Godfrey's interest in clinical research, and desire to impact people's health, accompanied her through her education at Louisiana State University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her undergraduate work was centered on plant metabolism, while as a graduate student she focused on basic research and microRNA processing.

She then joined epidemiologist and physician scientist **Jack Taylor, M.D., Ph.D.**, NIEHS Molecular and Genetic Epidemiology Group lead researcher, to embark on the quest to understand the role of microRNAs in breast and lung cancer.

Working in the Taylor lab offered Godfrey a number of unique opportunities to work in other scientific areas that she would not have had access to otherwise. For example, Godfrey's breast cancer project used samples collected in the NIEHS **Sister Study**, (<http://sisterstudy.niehs.nih.gov/English/index1.htm>) and looked into the potential of using microRNAs for early diagnosis or as susceptibility markers. Involvement in the study, which includes 50,000 participants, gave her an epidemiological perspective and a chance to design big projects, with hundreds of samples requiring high-throughput processing and advanced analysis. Godfrey also credits her mentor with giving her the freedom and tools necessary to be successful in designing and implementing such large-scale projects.

"I'm happy to see my scientific background in cancer coming together with my clinical interests," explained Godfrey about her enthusiasm for her new position. "I'll be really excited to see all the cutting-edge research and new protocols that might lead to new cancer treatments that can change people's lives."

Diligent job search

At first, Godfrey made regulatory affairs the focus of her job search. "I felt it was a field that could play at my strengths. I'm well organized and I thrive when there's a lot going on at once," she said. To further explore that option, she signed up for the workshop series preparing for the Regulatory Affairs Certification (RAC). The classes, organized by the North Carolina Regulatory Affairs Forum (**NCRAF**), (<http://www.ncraf.org/>) turned out to be a great source of information and a valuable networking opportunity. The theoretical knowledge acquired in the classroom, combined with the practical experience gained during an internship at the Duke Translational Medicine Institute and topped off with a lot of studying, helped Godfrey pass the RAC exam.

Adding the RAC certification to her long list of qualifications resulted in many job interviews, on the phone and in person, but lack of industry experience dissuaded potential employers. Still, credentials gave Godfrey confidence in answering interviewers' questions and boosted her perseverance in the job search.

Networking led Godfrey to many of the positions that she applied for, and others were advertised online. The scientific review officer job ad caught the eye of a friend who then sent it to Godfrey. Through contact with former NIEHS trainee Brant Hamel, Ph.D., currently at Duke Cancer Institute, she found out the name of the hiring manager and then approached him directly.

Godfrey took full advantage of the career support available to the NIEHS postdoctoral fellows, by attending workshops, seminars, and brown bag lunches; meeting with the NIH Office of Intramural Training and Education Career Counselor, Denise Saunders, Ph.D.; and regularly contributing to the Environmental Factor newsletter. Godfrey was also active in popularizing available career choices, by co-chairing the 2012 annual NIEHS Biomedical Career Fair and serving on the fair planning committees in 2010 and 2011.



Godfrey's advice to all the trainees was to attend as many networking and educational events, as well as lunches hosted by local organizations and societies, as possible. "It's not easy to talk to people at first, but you tend to get the same questions and, with practice, it gets easier," she said. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



"Doing a fellowship in my group helped Ashley build her knowledge of the clinical and epidemiologic aspects of biomedical research that was important for her getting the job at Duke," Taylor said. "That interdisciplinary research experience, coupled with her drive to network, develop, and explore multiple career paths was key. I think it's a great match for her." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

(Aleksandra Adomas, Ph.D., is a research fellow in the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis.)

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