

## **NIEHS fellow begins career in educational writing**

*By Aleksandra Adomas*

After completing postdoctoral training in the NIEHS Laboratory of Neurobiology, Jacqueline de Marchena Powell, Ph.D., began a career as a medical science writer and editor December 2013 with Education and Training Systems International (ETSI). Located in Chapel Hill, N.C., ETSI provides training materials for pharmaceutical, biotech, and medical device companies. Powell's first project was to develop an educational module for sales representatives and physicians on disorders of the reproductive system.

Following in-depth research on career options in life sciences, Powell focused on writing. A series of informational interviews reassured Powell that a writing job would be a good match for her personality, values, and skills, as well as a potential stepping-stone to other positions.

### **Negotiation power**

When Powell first learned about ETSI from her professional contacts, she was not discouraged by the lack of vacancy announcements on the company website and submitted her resume with a general inquiry about employment opportunities. That led to an online writing test, then an invitation to interview.

Seeking strategy advice and support, Powell met with Denise Saunders, Ph.D., career counselor with the NIH [Office of Intramural Training and Education](http://www.training.nih.gov/).

(<https://www.training.nih.gov/>)

Powell recalls it as a crucial meeting. "I knew I might need to accept a pay cut for an entry-level industry position, so I made a list of other things that were important to me," she said.

Saunders explained that in the hiring process, the only time the job seeker has leverage is immediately after an offer is extended. This knowledge gave Powell confidence to engage in negotiations once she received the job offer, and she was able to successfully negotiate flexible working hours.

### **NIEHS community support**

Powell expressed gratitude for the support she received from the NIEHS community during her job search. "I'm very fortunate to have met a number of outstanding mentors," she explained. Saunders guided her through job offer negotiations. Tammy Collins, Ph.D., director of the NIEHS [Office of Fellows' Career Development](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/), offered Powell assistance in brainstorming potential career options.

Huei-Chen Lao, a biologist on detail as a science education and outreach coordinator in the NIEHS [Office of Science Education and Diversity](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/), showed Powell that marketing skills are vital when looking for a job.

Eddy Ball, Ph.D., former Environmental Factor (e-Factor) editor, not only helped Powell with gaining writing experience, but also gave her constructive advice on expanding her professional network. "During the interview, I used the e-Factor experience to highlight my writing skills and interest in a writing career," Powell said. "Summarizing research papers for the Intramural Papers of the Month section [of the newsletter] was helpful when I was asked to describe my own research in lay language. It also demonstrated my ability to understand complex concepts and translate them for a nonscience audience," she added.

Finally, Powell gratefully acknowledged the support she received from Patricia Jensen, Ph.D., head of the [NIEHS Developmental Neurobiology Group](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/). During her 3 1/2 years of postdoctoral training, Powell worked with Jensen, studying a set of neurons in the mouse brain that release norepinephrine, an important neuromodulator. Powell was involved in the development of two mouse lines that allow selective manipulation of different subpopulations of norepinephrine-releasing neurons.

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



*Powell's advice to other postdoctoral fellows is to start applying for jobs early on in the postdoctoral training, to use LinkedIn to open up contacts and research position titles, and to attend local networking events like the ones organized by the [American Medical Writers Association](http://www.amwacarolinas.org/wp/) and the [North Carolina Regulatory Affairs Forum](http://www.ncraf.org/). (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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