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Tenure at Jefferson: Dr. Fitzgerald worked in the laboratory of Dr. Abdolmohamad Rostami in the Department of Neurology.

Interviewer – How did you enjoy your tenure at Jefferson?

Dr. Fitzgerald – For the most part I very much enjoyed my time at Jefferson. Like any scientist, I had very challenging times in the lab but the supportive environment, particularly throughout the postdoc community, certainly helped me deal with the challenges of a career in scientific research.

Interviewer – What were your job search strategies?

Dr. Fitzgerald – The first step in my job search strategy was to identify what job I actually wanted to do! While I had an interest in running my own independent laboratory from an early stage in my postdoctoral training, I also investigated a range of other career possibilities. This involved reading the career books, attending talks on alternative careers in science and talking to people I knew in different sectors. Once I was set on pursuing an independent faculty position the next strategy was to define my geographic limitations. Personally I wanted to move closer to my home country of Ireland and began talking to academics in my field in Ireland to make contacts and let people know I was looking for a position. I was also routinely searching online job advertisements for positions in Ireland and the UK. I also submitted grant applications as PI with a view to increasing my chance of landing a faculty position.

Interviewer – What was the application and interview process like for a faculty position? Do you think it's different in the US vs. Ireland?

Dr. Fitzgerald – In general, the application process consisted of an initial informal inquiry about the position to assess if there was a 'fit' between what the employers sought and what I wanted to do. Being research intensive, I wasn't suited to positions with heavy teaching burdens for example. Once I felt that I may be a good fit for a position, I submitted a formal application which in general consisted of an application form, my CV and in some cases a research statement. The next step was interviewing and visiting the institution to meet with scientists there. For the position I eventually accepted, a negotiation period followed the initial offer of the position. I think this recruitment process is pretty similar to that of the US.

Interviewer – How easy or hard was it to be applying for positions in another country?

Dr. Fitzgerald – It was easy to apply with the exception of working phone conversations around a 5 hour time difference. I did one telephone interview at 6am! What perhaps was more difficult however was keeping up-to-date with new positions and initiatives that I may have been suited to. That requires regular contact with the institutions, academics and funding bodies in the country you are applying to.

Interviewer – How did your postdoc experience or activities at TJU prepare you to attain your current position?

Dr. Fitzgerald – My postdoc in TJU developed my CV and skill set which ultimately landed me my current position. However I would stress that this is not just publications. Papers and presentations are essential but so too are the so-called 'soft skills' that are often not given adequate attention in postdoctoral training. Skills such as interviewing, CV preparation, giving talks, networking, working on committees, working with academic and industrial entities, self-

promotion, time management, lab management, grant-writing, basic knowledge of intellectual property issues, funding strategies and use of mentors are some of these very important skills and my postdoctoral training at TJU gave me the opportunity to develop and improve these skills. However in most cases, I needed to work from my own initiative to seek out the opportunities to work on these skills. Luckily the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs (OPA) and the JPA ran local events to address these areas of postdoctoral training and thus I was able to integrate this aspect of my training with my laboratory skills training. I also wrote a professional development plan, at the suggestion of Dr. Lisa Kozlowski, Jefferson's Associate Dean for Postdoctoral Affairs and Recruitment, very early on in my postdoc. This was an invaluable tool – not only to lay out how much work was ahead of me if I wanted to reach my goal but also to help me prioritise and plan. Although I didn't follow it exactly, I reached the goal I had set out which was to have my own independent laboratory within 5 years. Despite not adhering to the details of the plan, I was able to monitor my progress and pay attention to different aspects of my training when necessary.

Interviewer – Can you describe how your present job is different from your postdoc experience in TJU?

Dr. Fitzgerald – My present job involves much of what I did during my postdoc but now also includes lab management, recruitment, more mentoring, purchasing for an entirely new lab, teaching, MANY more meetings, more administration, more grantwriting, and establishing more collaborations. So essentially I am my own postdoc, lab manager, teacher and PI.

Interviewer – If there is anything you would like to have done or would like to do differently about your career path, what would it be?

Dr. Fitzgerald – I would probably do a second postdoc in a different lab and area of science rather than spending four years in just one.

Interviewer – If there was one major piece of advice for postdocs here at Jefferson, what would it be?

Dr. Fitzgerald – Diversify your skill set. Papers alone are not enough. Regardless of your next career step, you will most likely need to be adept at a range of skills beyond publishing papers. Start this early and do it continuously. Remember, a postdoctoral fellowship is just that – a fellowship so you should be gaining in knowledge and skills to advance your abilities as a scientist.