

## **Baylor College of Medicine President Sees Great Value in PhD Career Development Hannah C. Cheung<sup>1</sup>, Jennifer McGehee<sup>1</sup>, Timothy R. Mahoney<sup>1</sup>, Christopher S. Bland<sup>1</sup>, and Rajesh Ramakrishnan<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This is an account of how our postdoctoral association received unexpected and unprecedented support from the president of our institution for our annual career symposium, held for both graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. This support has had a large impact on both our trainees and others in the Texas Medical Center. Therefore, we challenge other institutional leaders to follow Dr. Klotman's example.

The Postdoctoral Association (PDA) at the Baylor College of Medicine (BCM) in Houston, Texas, was first established in 1997 as a platform for more than 600 postdoctoral researchers to voice concerns about their training experience. In recent years, the PDA has advocated successfully with the school administration for policies on vacation and sick leave, a year-long career development course, and an annual career symposium. This symposium provides information on how graduate students and postdocs can transition into various PhD careers, a career development activity that was previously lacking at BCM. It is open to graduate students and postdoctoral researchers from all institutions at the Texas Medical Center in Houston and has 150-200 attendees each year.

Finding sources of funding for these types of events is an ongoing challenge for many postdoctoral associations. Our PDA activities are supported by voluntary donations from the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and a few departments at the College. This minimal funding restricts the selection of speakers to faculty and local individuals. Because of budget cuts in the last few years, these monies have dwindled substantially. Though the PDA did its best with the limited resources, we were pleasantly surprised by a recent turn of events.

Dr. Paul Klotman became the new president at BCM in 2010, and saw a need to increase trainee career development. In the summer of 2011, he created an

unusual and unique Advisory Committee comprised of trainee representatives including, among others, graduate students and postdoctoral researchers. Dr. Klotman attended the first Advisory Committee meeting and listened intently to concerns raised by the trainees. At this meeting, the PDA submitted a budget outlining the plans for career-building activities that required funding. In the few months following that meeting, the PDA was informed that our \$6000 budget for the career symposium was approved. Our PDA received funds from the "President's Circle" discretionary account to use towards the symposium, an almost unprecedented generous use of the funds, during a time of economic austerity when many programs and departments were not receiving budgetary increases.

With these funds, the PDA was able to improve the quality and reach of the symposium. We hosted an outstanding keynote speaker, Dr. Jane Chin, founder of the Medical Scientific Liaison Institute, along with four more external speakers who spoke about different career topics. Further, the BCM PDA was approached by its counterpart, the Postdoctoral Association at MD Anderson Cancer Center to partner in the organization. This has allowed the PDA to invite more speakers, print a program, and provide lunch and refreshments. We had over 300 attendees and received positive feedback from both trainees and faculty.

In honor of Dr. Klotman's support, we entitled the event "The First Annual Presidential Career Symposium" and had Dr. Klotman give the opening address. We realize that this type of support is sadly

uncommon and hope that Dr. Klotman's actions will spur on similar decisions by upper leadership at other institutions.