

While listening to last week's Molecular and Computational Psychiatry seminar by Mary Beth Hatten, I was reflecting on our long scientific connection and the many professional relationships we build and sustain through the years. I first met her in her brand-new lab at Rockefeller University when I was finishing grad school. From that point of searching for a new scientific direction as a postdoc, the connection has been important over the years as our paths have crossed and diverged.

That's what starts in the postdoc period—a more independent pursuit of intriguing questions. That's what we celebrate in our annual Postdoc Appreciation Week—the vital role of our postdocs in pushing the science forward. Released from graduate coursework and exams and bringing substantial expertise in their field, postdocs are the key to advancing knowledge and taking labs in new directions.

In my lab, our epigenetics work was launched years ago by a postdoc who had previously worked in the cancer field where epigenetics was studied earlier than in neuroscience. This has continued to be the case as each new postdoc has helped to expand the scope of what my lab can accomplish. And it's not just research. The teaching and mentoring postdocs offer to our graduate and undergraduate students is invaluable. We simply would not be able to accomplish anywhere near what we do in the INI without our postdocs.

This is not to say it's all smooth sailing. That new independence to pursue one's own research questions can be both exhilarating and daunting. It can be difficult to build a network of support with colleagues so diffuse throughout the university. Our [UI Postdoc Association](#) does a great job of organizing both learning and social events to bring postdocs together and offer a base of support. The association also is active in advocacy at the university level to ensure fair treatment for all postdocs.

And certainly, the pandemic has exacerbated some of the difficulties that already existed. The opportunity to make connections with potential postdoc mentors has been severely limited without our usual conferences, meetings, and visiting seminar speakers. I know that my favorite part of visiting another campus to present a seminar is often the lunch with grad students and postdocs who are so eager to discuss their work and their vision for future research.

It's not an equal substitute, but the virtual seminars that have sprung up in the last 18 months present an opportunity that wasn't there before. Our Big Ten Neuroscience Seminar Series was not on the radar until the pandemic cut us off from meeting at SfN or other established meetings. Because we began thinking about how to connect without travel, we have opened opportunities to highlight junior faculty and trainees who

might not otherwise be in the spotlight. These sessions offer a great chance to learn about which labs may be hiring and about grad students and postdocs doing innovative work across the Big Ten. I encourage you to join the Zoom on the third Thursday of each month whenever you can.

While the official Postdoc Appreciation Week may be over, my gratitude for your energy, innovation, leadership, and commitment to scientific discovery remains strong all year long.