

What resident physicians considering an academic career should know

JAN 18, 2022

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Working in an academic setting can give physicians a hands-on patient care experience while giving them the opportunity to train the next generation of physicians. It also offers physicians a chance to pursue scholarly pursuits through research.

A panel conducted during the 2021 AMA Research Challenge—an event that provided medical students, residents, fellows and international medical graduates the opportunity to showcase research and engage with the AMA beyond traditional policy and advocacy opportunities—examined what career opportunities in academic medicine look like. Here are some key takeaways.

Shape the future

Many physicians working in the academic field find the mentorship aspect of the position rewarding.

“Growing up with the medical system, through education I had a lot of truly great teachers and mentors,” said Alëna A. Balasanova, MD, an AMA member and assistant professor in the psychiatry department at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha. “I felt compelled to pay that forward and to teach the next generation the way that I was taught. It was something that was really important to me—to give something back. That was really what academic medicine represented to me.”

Learn about the research on *Moraxella catarrhalis* won \$10,000.

Wear multiple hats

Working at an academic medical center allows a physician to be a jack of all trades.

“One of my mentors as a medical student got me interested in academic medicine because she did a little bit of everything,” said AMA member Tracy Henry, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at Emory University. “And that’s what I wanted. I do a little bit [of] inpatient medicine, a bit of outpatient, I teach, I do a little bit of scholarly work in research as well.

“In academic medicine, the sky is the limit,” Dr. Henry added. “You stay on top of all the latest ... evidenced-based guidelines and you have the ultimate career because you are shaping the next generation of learners.”

Find out how you can make your poster?presentation stand out at a conference.

Academia moves slowly

Particularly as a recent graduate, you may have the energy and desire to shake things up. It might not happen right away, however.

“It took several years to develop what I was looking to develop and what I thought would truly help the patients,” Dr. Balasanova said. “Since then, it has blossomed into additional services. ... It was a challenge to get buy in and it was a challenge to get resources.”

“Many of us, particularly as younger grads, go into academia with these bright ideas hoping to change the world, and I still do, but it takes time and it doesn’t happen overnight.”

You can pivot into academic medicine

Even if you don’t move from residency to an academic position or work in the field for a decade plus, if you are conducting research and contributing to the body of knowledge for the medical field, you can make the move.

“I definitely know it’s never too late [to get into academic medicine],” said Nicole Riddle, MD, an AMA member and assistant professor and associate residency program director at the University of South Florida in Tampa. “I know people that were community practitioners with no exposure to medical students for sometimes 20 years. You can go back. You have to be mindful of it. You can write papers and be involved in local” medical associations.