

Interview with SKMC student David Hoang: The academic path that sparked a journey beyond the walls of clinical care

Describe your academic background.

I actually started at Jefferson in 2008 and did the combined degree program, which is an 8-year program. I did the first two years, the preclinical years in the medical school, and then I started my PhD in Biochemistry. I did four years of research and then did my thesis defense in August of 2014 when I basically completed all the requirements for the PhD degree. My specific area of research was in prostate cancer biology with Dr. Marja Navalainen, who was with the Kimmel Cancer Center at the time. After finishing my research, I returned to medical school to finish the last two clinical years.

I've always been the kind of person that likes to impact health care from a larger perspective. I realized that the day in and day out of being a clinician is very rewarding, but the impact there is less than what you might get through larger avenues, such as research or development of a drug or a therapy that may potentially reach a larger population. That's what really drove me to go that route.

What motivated you to enroll in the elective, "Business of Medicine" at Weill Cornell Medicine?

While working on my PhD, I was fortunate to connect with a few alumni of Jefferson who had migrated over to industry and I found their perspectives pretty interesting. I wanted more exposure to that; this internship was an opportunity to get that exposure in a condensed timeframe.

This internship was part of a 2-month

course. Through a professor at Weill Cornell, I was connected to Huron Consulting Group. They have practices in healthcare as well as life sciences. I was in the life sciences practice and my job consisted of day to day interacting with a number of clients in the pharmaceutical and biotech industry. The length of the internship was the same length of the course.

What did you work on at Huron?

One of the projects was in lung cancer, and I got exposed to the cutting edge of what is going on right now in the field in terms of therapies. Part of my job was to try to predict where the field is going within the next 10 years, which was really fascinating to me. I had to take the current knowledge and extrapolate out to the future treatment paradigms. That kind of work was very intellectual and pulled on both research and clinical skills.

I really enjoyed the people at Huron, they were fantastic, and it was an interdisciplinary environment. People came from many different backgrounds, and the majority did have a business background of some sort.

What did you learn that you didn't anticipate learning?

I learned how a business or large organization functioned. This for me was a step in a totally new direction. I'm used to being in the trenches. But there was an organizational aspect, and part of that was learning how to communicate with people at all different levels – from the board down through different departments and operational levels. That to me was a new



David Hoang

experience. I realized how many people actually have to get mobilized to move a new idea forward, launch a new product, or change direction.

How do you think you will use this experience in your career?

In the short-term, I do have an opportunity as soon as I graduate in June with another company, doing similar work that I did at Huron. In the future, I would like to be in a senior leadership position at a pharmaceutical or biotech company.

Would you encourage other MD students to participate in similar courses and internships?

Yes, any medical student that has any type of interest in anything outside of direct clinical practice could benefit from something like this. I think there's a lot of flexibility in these types of opportunities in terms of getting the type of experience desired by the student.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

As you embark on this new journey, what are some of your reflections on your time at Jefferson and your career path?

This hasn't been the most direct pathway. I enjoyed my time at Jefferson a great deal in all the different facets that I've experienced. Many times your career path doesn't unfold linearly, and there's nothing

wrong with that. Sometimes students are anxious about having everything lined up, but my advice to younger students is that you don't necessarily need to have that in place. Sometimes the best way to go is to let it unfold naturally.

Looking at the past eight years, I really like this new direction Jefferson is going. There has been a true interdisciplinary

push and I think Dr. Klasko has done a lot to move it in that direction. I see many efforts to connect between different departments, and implement new initiatives, and realize as an organization, that we all are involved in the mission of improving health and to get there we need to truly work as a team.