

Jennifer S. Goodrich

Postdoc Department: Clinical Microbiology—McClendon Clinical Laboratory

Postdoc Ended: June 2007

Interview date 10/13/07

Current Title: Molecular Biology Laboratory Manager

Institution / Company: National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center (managed by Battelle National Biodefense Institute), Frederick, MD

Describe a typical day?

I spend a lot of time at my desk and a little bit of time in the laboratory, primarily for training at this point. Desk time includes writing and responding to email, writing and reviewing protocols, addressing improvement issues to determine how to conduct procedures more efficiently, reviewing results, inputting information into the laboratory information management system, drafting weekly and monthly reports, as well as drafting and reviewing case work analysis plans and reports. With a staff of 8, there is a lot to coordinate from scheduling to assigning projects and laboratory maintenance (inventory, equipment, and purchasing). I attend meetings with other managers, directors, and other departments within the organization to plan future projects. Participation in drafting budgets and implementation plans occurs at the end of the fiscal year (which is now). I'd like to answer this question again in 6 months to a year after I have been in my position for more than a few months.

What do you enjoy most?

I enjoy the interacting with the laboratory specialists, learning how to conduct forensic experiments, and discussing future projects with other managers. We are in the process of matrixing our environment with the Biological Threat Characterization Center and this will provide the opportunity for me to learn new concepts and projects from many interesting people.

What are some of the challenges?

It is difficult to stay at my desk all day, I am a scientist and I feel like I am not doing much science at the moment (though I believe this will change in a few months). We are a new organization preparing for accreditation. Learning and understanding the processes involved with accrediting a laboratory for ISO 17025 is incredibly challenging. Being new to the field and working in a forensic environment is also difficult. What makes it even more challenging that I am the manager of the group and I know the least about the entire process. I spend a lot of time asking questions. I am often required to make decisions about processes and procedures which I have just learned about in the previous 5 minutes. This is very difficult because I am always questioning if I am making the right decisions (time will tell).

What is the biggest misconception about your career field?

That manager's have time to spend in the laboratory conducting experiments and that the job is confined to the office during normal business hours. I hope this is all result of my being new to the position and the field, but I do miss the lab work and experiments.

How did you find out about your current position?

Ironically, despite all the contacts I made and people I knew, I found my current position on the internet at Indeed.com (a website which searches all job websites).

What strategies or resources did you find most helpful during your job search? Please include any OPS related resources and service and/or our outside resources?

Talking to people who had recently been or were going through the process was without a doubt the most helpful activity for finding a job. The process is very frustrating, slow, and can make you lose all confidence in your abilities. Meeting with Dara in OPS was very useful in terms of identifying ideas on what to do next and how to conduct a more productive search. I received excellent feedback on letters and resumes that I drafted from OPS. The OPS has a perspective that many scientists are not taught—this information is invaluable in searching for a new position. I attended all career related discussions sponsored by OPS and used the alumni database contacts as well. These contacts were useful in finding people who provided great advice, motivation to keep searching, and useful for exploring different career options. I attended many networking events in RTP which were informative and helped prepare me for working in industry.

How long was your job search?

6 months

Looking back on your time as a postdoc or your job search, what do you wish you would have done differently?

I wish I had started the job search earlier. It is incredibly difficult and trying (and you often feel like you don't have time to devote to it, but it is critically important). I wish I had done more research on different career options and made contacts earlier so that I had a better idea of what to expect when my search officially began. I should have contacted OPS earlier and been working on my cover letters and resumes prior to being ready to apply.

What career planning and/or job search advice do you have for current postdocs interested in your career field?

Establish and maintain a network of people in your field and in any field in which you have any interest in perusing. Do this early and keep in close contact. Knowing people is important and may open doors that would not otherwise be opened. While contacts are important and may be productive, don't be afraid to think outside the box and explore all opportunities. This is how I found my current position.