

Straight from the Horse's Mouth: Mentors, Mentees & Recruiters Tell All about Careers for Epidemiologists

U.S. Government: Combining Research, Mentoring & Service Work

Martha S. Linet, M.D., MPH

**Workshop at
ACE Annual Meeting
September 13, 2009**

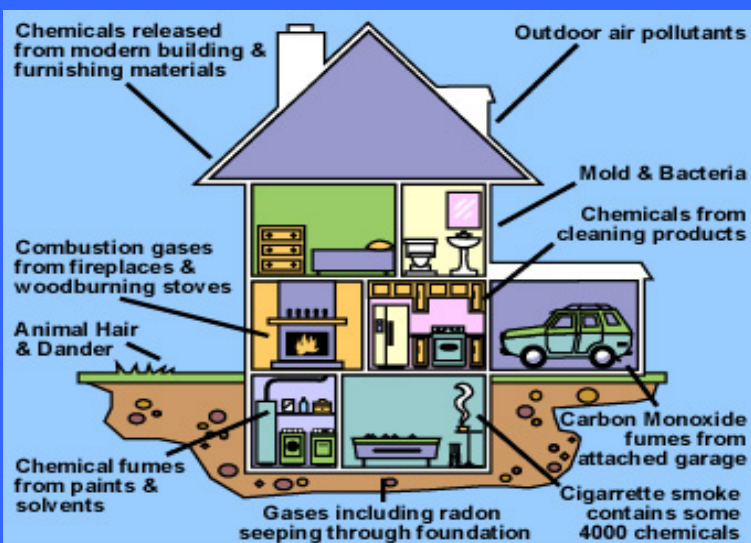
Career Experience

- **7 years in academia - Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Dept of Epidemiology**
 - 2 years Instructor
 - 4 years Assistant Professor
 - 1 year Associate Professor
- **22 years at National Cancer Institute**
 - 7 years as Expert
 - 15 years as Senior Tenured Investigator including 7 years as Branch Chief

Govt Research has a Mission

Primary Mission: To identify and quantify cancer risks associated with postulated carcinogens, and evaluate factors that may modify carcinogenesis

Other Goals: To improve exposure assessment, model uncertainty, and elucidate biological mechanisms of carcinogenesis



Govt Researcher: Other Vital Roles

**Division of Cancer
Epidemiology & Genetics:
Intramural Research Program**

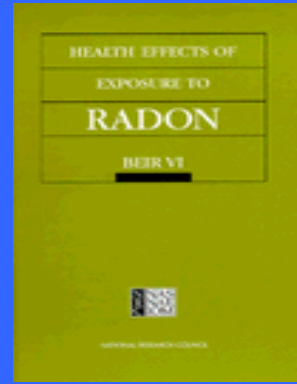
**Governmental
needs**



Training



**Scientific
Service**



**Risk
communication**

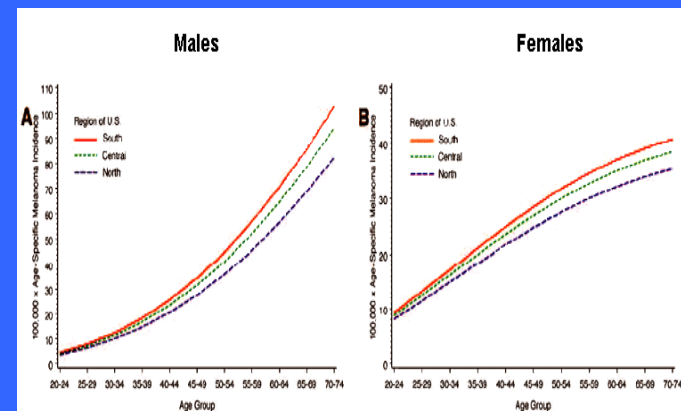


Benefits: Research, Mentoring, Service

- **Full-time research**
- **Mentoring**
 - Pre-docs & post-docs: one-on-one
 - Short courses & lectures in academia
- **Use expertise for public service**
 - Carry out Congressionally mandated studies
 - Address national and international concerns
 - Serve on national & international Committees
 - Produce software, monographs, & educational materials
 - Leadership in professional organizations

Examples of Service

- **Congressional mandate:** cell phones and brain tumors
- **Address national & international concerns:** cancer risk projection for screening procedures
- **Produce software** (risk calculator for cancer risks from fallout)
- **Create websites** (Chernobyl residents, families at high risk of cancer)



Disadvantages: Scientific, Govt Responsibilities, Administrative Hurdles

Scientific & Govt Responsibilities

Don't always choose research studies

Time is not under one's own control

Administrative Hurdles

Paperwork

Required training

Scientific investigation by contract (annual budget)

Why Government Research Agency? Late Career Perspective

■ Good fit if you:

- Wish to focus on research, mentoring, public service
- Have a clearly defined research specialty
- Are energized by working in a highly collaborative research setting
- Would like to work on high-risk and/or international studies
- Can juggle, multi-task, and be flexible

■ May not be a good fit if you:

- Wish to pursue a broad range of research topics
- Like to spend lots of time teaching in classroom settings
- Hope to combine private sector consulting with research

Working in the Government Intramural Research Program: The National Cancer Institute



Preetha Rajaraman, PhD

ACE Career Development Workshop, September 13, 2009

Preetha's Background

- MS in Environmental Health from University of Washington (focus Industrial Hygiene)
- 2 years work experience in research group within Washington State Dept. of Labor and Industries
- PhD in Epidemiology from Johns Hopkins with focus on environment and cancer
- 7+ years in Radiation Epidemiology Branch, Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics
 - 3 years pre-doctoral fellowship
 - 4 years postdoctoral fellowship
 - 6 months as tenure track investigator

Why Intramural Research Program?

- Pre-doctoral work
 - Opportunity to learn molecular epidemiology from the experts in the field
 - Concentration of exceptional cancer epidemiologists
 - Excellent resources
 - Location
- Post-doctoral work (easy decision!)
 - Continue dissertation work, and build research areas
 - Excellent scientific and career mentorship

After Post-Doc: Factors considered in Job Search

- Type of Job
 - Job description / duties
 - Independence to pursue research ideas
 - Availability of teaching opportunities
 - Opportunity for growth and new challenges
- Specifics
 - Early career support
 - Publication/grant record of recent hires
 - Availability of resources relevant to my research
 - Location, pay, benefits, stability

Final choices and decision

- Academic versus intramural research program (IRP)
- Chose IRP based on
 - early career support:
 - Mentoring
 - Projects
 - 7-yr commitment
 - research opportunities, resources
 - location, salary/benefits

Experience in Intramural so far

- Strong early career support
 - Ability to build research areas of interest
 - Availability of resources
- Flexibility (performance-oriented)
- Opportunity to mentor
- Options for classroom teaching, grant-writing - have to be pro-active
- Work with federal policy and programmatic goals
- Opportunity for growth and new challenges

Why Government Research Agency?

- Good fit if you:
 - Want to focus on research, publications
 - Already have a good idea of your research interests
 - Enjoy collaborative and inter-disciplinary work
 - Can be flexible
- May not be good fit if:
 - You would like to develop your research program independent of programmatic goals
 - Teaching is very important to you