Hematology Fellows Prefer Rewarding Careers

By Paul Cheng, MD, PhD, and Richard Schwab, MD

Agroup of hematology fellows will be attending today's 11:45 a.m. lectures by Dr. Robert Todd III and Dr. Mark Ramirez on "How to Land Your Perfect Job in Hematology." The presentations will cover aspects of both academic and private-practice job searches.

Dr. Todd spoke with the writers about his planned lecture and offered some general advice for trainees at the ASH annual meeting:

Q - Who should attend these lectures?

A - These lectures are valuable at any stage of training. Third-year fellows may already be lining up interviews but can still benefit from learning about interviewing, preparing an appropriate seminar "Job Talk," types of faculty appointments, offer letters, and salary expectations. First- and second-year fellows will benefit by thinking ahead. The ASH annual meeting is an excellent time for interviews, but arrangements need to be made in advance, so current third-year fellows may be too late to take advantage of this opportunity.

Q - Is there really such a thing as a perfect job?

A - Sure, in theory - one size doesn't fit all. Don't settle; look at different opportunities. It is possible to find something close to ideal. The more marketable you are, the more opportunities will be available.

Q - What about those who are only boarded in hematology?

A - If you are committed to a career in academic medicine, there is no advantage to getting boarded in medical oncology. Of course, in private practice there will be fewer opportunities.

Q - Do you think that hematology programs focus enough on where their graduates are likely to go? Is there an unrealistic expectation that all graduates will be academicians?

A - It is program dependent. Some plan to have graduates mainly go into private practice, while others select fellows with an interest in academic medicine. As an example, University of Michigan focuses on academics, and 60 percent of our graduates follow this path.

Q - Do you think that recent changes in reimbursement are encouraging new hematologists to stay in academics?

A - I don't know that we've seen that yet. I think private practice is still attractive because of compensation. I do think that the NIH Loan Repayment Program *(www.lrp.nih.gov)* has been very helpful to offset significant debt and help some stay in academics.

Q - Do you see more new hematologists going into industry?

A - No, not really; that is an attractive option, but no one from our program has gone straight into industry. I have seen some movement into industry later in our graduates' careers.

Q - What advice do you have for fellows attending their first annual meeting?

A - Because it is so big, plan ahead. Look at the program in advance and map out where to be. If you have an area to focus on, it is easy - otherwise go to as many trainee events as possible. They are designed to be useful for trainees, so take advantage of them.

Q - What advice do you have for those attending for the last time as a fellow?

A - Again, the ASH annual meeting may be an opportunity to meet with prospective employers, but these are usually lined up in advance.

Q - Any other comments?

A - One other pitch: consider applying for the ASH Clinical Research Training Institute (*www.hematology.org/education/training/crti.cfm*) early in your fellowship. This program is particularly valuable for those interested in patient-oriented, translational research. Although the program is open to trainees of all levels and junior faculty, consider this before designing your first clinical trial. Since this program is limited to hematologists, the ratio of applicants to available slots is reasonable (in the past close to 50 percent of applicants have been accepted.)