

Fellows Corner

What I Wish I'd Known Before I Started Fellowship

We have all experienced those moments when we wonder what we have gotten ourselves into. Nephrology fellowship is one of these life-altering events, so we asked a sampling of current fellows the one thing they wish they had known before starting training.

Some answers focused on the practical. Deepthi Torri, of North Shore Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park, N.Y., said better understanding of renal physiology would have helped. "Taking *Textbook of Medical Physiology* by Arthur Guyton out of the dusty bookshelf and reading the renal physiology chapters from beginning to end would have been time well spent," Torri said.

Ruba Nijmeh, fellow at Ohio State University Medical Center in Columbus, remembers the first overwhelming days of fellowship when the pager went off for the acute dialysis room. "You answer your page, and the nurse on the other end of the phone is asking you for orders: what type of bath you want, how many hours, what anticoagulation, etc.," Nijmeh said. "Of course, as you don't happen to know

the right answer, you go with what the nurse says. Most of the time, the nurse is experienced and helps you make the right decision." Any of the basic building blocks of inpatient nephrology would have been helpful, she added.

Rajiv Vij of the North Shore University Hospital did not realize how many choices there were within nephrology. These include private practice, clinical investigation, and basic science research. "For candidates who are uncertain, I support application to either clinical fellowship programs with an option to do a third year of research, or to programs that have an open-mindedness with respect to the new niches in nephrology," he said.

One interesting answer focused on the transition from resident to specialty fellow. As a resident, "your goal was more of a facilitator and making sure all of your patients' bases were covered," according to Josh Bitter of the Ohio State University Medical Center. Transitioning from the big-picture, coordination of care view to an organ system view presented challenges. "Once I realized my role as a consult-

ant was to provide the best, most focused input in my area of expertise, primary services were much more appreciative."

Finally, Nathan Hellman of Massachusetts General Hospital focused on more personal aspects. Hellman is a new member of the *ASN Kidney News* editorial board.

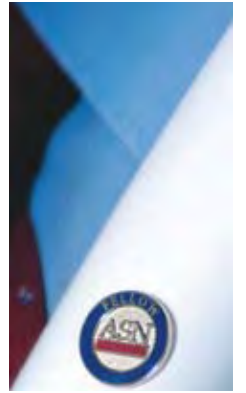
"Try and think beyond the two to three years of fellowship to what you will be doing in your post-educational life." Changes in personal status, like marriage and children, alter one's perspective. "I find myself having to incorporate into my professional desires a whole new series of variables: affordability of day care options, employability options for my wife, and proximity to relatives are just a few examples," Hellman said. "I am not suggesting that the academic aspects of a nephrology program be overlooked—they are still probably the most important factor to consider—but rather that the decision-making process becomes more complex with increasing life responsibilities.

"Even though things have generally worked out for me despite my ignorance

of these family-related variables at the time of my fellowship interviews, it now seems silly to have not taken these factors into account at the time of my decision," Hellman said. "I do not think that my situation is

that unique, as the fellowship period is very often a time of rapid change: new relationships, marriage, children; even the transition from everyday clinical work to the different pace of a research project can be profound. It may be impossible to predict exactly how things will change, but keep in mind that they certainly will."

Change is almost universal, but one thing will remain constant: new fellows will always find something they wish they had known before their journey to become nephrologists. ●



ASN Provides Key Information to U.S. Senate Finance Committee

In December 2009, Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-IA), ranking minority member of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, wrote 33 nonprofit medical groups—among them the American Society of Nephrology (ASN), the American Medical Association, and the American College of Physicians—to request information on industry funding awarded to those societies. As part of his ongoing review of medical education programs in the United States, Sen. Grassley asked each organization to supply details about commercial support received in the years 2006 through 2009, as well as information about internal policies on managing and disclosing potential conflicts of interest.

ASN leaders were pleased to be able to send to Sen. Grassley the information requested and share with the Senate Finance Committee the society's long-standing commitment to educational and scientific objectivity. ASN maintains a strong foundation of institutional integrity, integrity in its interactions with other organizations, and serves as a model for self-governance and transparency.

Because ASN is an accredited provider of continuing medical education, the society adheres to the six "Standards for Commercial Support" recommended by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME). These standards (www.accme.org) ensure independence and objectivity of the programs presented to physicians and other learners. Commercial interests do not plan, deliver, or evaluate educational content provided by ASN, and ASN has established numerous means of separation between fundraising and planning, executing, and evaluating educational programs.

Any professional society should actively and regularly assess potential conflicts of interest related to executing its mission, goals, and agendas. Thus, in addition to supporting ACCME guidelines, ASN regularly examines and updates its own policies on managing potential conflicts. Most recently, ASN in 2008 convened the Committee on Corporate Relations, and this group conducted a comprehensive assessment of the society's mechanisms for addressing and managing potential

conflicts. The ASN Committee on Corporate Relations presented its final report to the ASN Council in early 2009, and the committee's recommendations were endorsed unanimously.

This effort resulted in a number of advances such as developing a new section on the ASN website: the ASN Conflict of Interest Initiative: Transparency in Relationships with Commercial Interests (<http://www.asn-online.org/coi/>). This section, open to the public, provides a wealth of information about ASN as well as general resources on managing potential conflicts. In a further effort to provide vital information and resources to ASN members and others in the kidney community, ASN published the committee's final report and an editorial outlining ASN policies and plans for implementing the recommendations (*J Am Soc Nephrol* 2009; 20:1853–59 and 1860–62).

ASN also provided Sen. Grassley information on advertising in ASN journals and *ASN Kidney News*, meeting exhibits at ASN Renal Week and other ASN venues, as well as unrestricted educational grants for ASN Renal Week,

Renal WeekEnds, and the Annual Board Review Course and Update. Speakers at ASN meetings follow all ACCME standards regarding disclosure, and the society makes every effort to see that presenters disclose all potential conflicts of interest, and that sessions are moderated to meet these standards of disclosure.

Having successfully partnered in the past to advance patient care, clinical research, and medical education, societies and commercial interests can continue to do so in the future provided they follow strict standards of disclosure, evaluation, and documentation. ASN recognizes the value of inquiries such as those conducted by Sen. Grassley and supports all efforts that promote effective policies such as those outlined by the society at <http://www.asn-online.org/coi/>. ASN members, other kidney professionals, and patients benefit from the society's ongoing review of its policies to ensure they appropriately support ASN's mission of promoting the highest quality care for patients, supporting cutting-edge research, and educating the next generation of kidney professionals. ●