

## The Give and Take between Two Careers and a Family

*This is the first of two articles dealing with dual-career recruiting. Next month's article, by Angela McNerney, describes Tech Valley Connect, an innovative approach developed in the Albany, NY, area to hire and retain professionals who are in dual-career relationships.*

My wife, Wendie Berg, and I recently had our first opportunity to give talks together at the same meeting. The occasion was the annual board meeting of the Rosalind Franklin Society ([www.rosalindfranklinsociety.org](http://www.rosalindfranklinsociety.org)), a group devoted to fostering the accomplishments



*Wendie and Jeremy Berg*

of women in the life sciences and related disciplines. Wendie's invitation to speak was readily understandable. She is a well-known clinician–scientist who had participated in a lively discussion about the controversies around mammography at the recent Women's Health Congress. But why was I invited? From the email I received, it was clear that my invitation was related to my recent departure as Director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) and the press release that included the statement, "I had no intention of leaving NIGMS at this point, but am doing so in support of the career of my wife, a leading breast imaging clinical researcher. After a change in her situation earlier this year, she was recruited by many institutions around the country, and the University of Pittsburgh offered tremendous opportunities for each of us."<sup>1</sup>

### Achieving Balance

At the Rosalind Franklin Society, I gave a talk entitled "The Give and Take between Two Careers and Family." The major theme of my talk was the altered decisions and, in some cases, compromises, that we had made over the course of more than 25 years of balancing two careers and our family. My departure from NIGMS was hardly the first time that these issues had arisen. Indeed, the beginning of our marriage

was centered on such considerations. As the completion of my PhD studies approached, I was fortunate to line up a postdoctoral fellowship in the laboratory of a Nobel laureate in England. As this was evolving, I was becoming reacquainted with Wendie, whom I had dated in college. Wendie was then a student in the

MD-PhD program at Johns Hopkins. After some months exploring possibilities for Wendie to spend some time overseas during her studies, I realized that the far simpler solution was to identify a suitable postdoctoral opportunity for me in Baltimore. Fortunately, I found a position with Carl Pabo, then a young assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, who was working in areas that overlapped my interests well. From there, I was pleased to receive an offer for a faculty position in the Chemistry Department at Johns Hopkins. My research went very well and, after four years, I was recruited back to the School of Medicine as Director of the Department of Biophysics and Biophysical Chemistry.

My anchor in Baltimore greatly influenced Wendie's career path. Wendie was very interested in breast imaging, but the institutions in Baltimore were not particularly strong in that field. Nonetheless, she developed her own opportunities, at Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland and then in an unusual situation where she was doing clinical work in a private practice while running several multicenter clinical trials as a consultant with no formal academic affiliation. Over the years, both Wendie and I were approached regarding potentially interesting career opportunities. However, in many cases, the



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institution recruiting one of us did not pay sufficient attention to the dual-career aspects of the recruitment to make it workable. About two years ago, Wendie's unusual clinical care–research arrangement became unstable, eventually leading to our departure to Pittsburgh.

### Acknowledging the Role of Dual-Career Considerations

After we reached our decision to move to Pittsburgh, I began to work on the announcement regarding my departure from NIGMS. When the draft was submitted for approval, I received feedback that some felt that comments regarding the role of Wendie's situation in my departure were not appropriate. I must admit that I was stunned by this reaction since this was the major factor in my departure. Furthermore, while I was not consciously trying to “make a statement,” such dual-career considerations are central to many couples and not acknowledging them when possible seemed inappropriate. After some effort I prevailed and the discussion of the dual-career aspects of our decision was included in the release.

I was surprised at the strength of the reactions to this aspect of the announcement. I received numerous comments from National Institutes of Health (NIH) colleagues, members of the scientific community, and even on some blogs, thanking me for including the two-career factor in the announcement. I also learned that this reaction was not uniform. A faculty member at a prominent research university told me she had overheard one of her colleagues say to another, “It is bad enough that he is leaving NIH because of his wife's career, but to publicly acknowledge it is a very bad precedent.” It strikes me as troubling and somewhat sad that simple recognition of the role of dual-career considerations in a job transition appears to be so noteworthy in this day and age.

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### Considering a Family's Needs

Over the years, our career decisions have also depended on considerations of our entire family. We have three children, the youngest of whom, our daughter Monica, moved with us to Pittsburgh. In some cases, potentially attractive career opportunities were quite problematic with regard to options for schools for our children. Finding schools that are a good match to particular children's needs and interests and the logistics of transportation can be quite challenging for children and parents alike. In another consequence of my departure announcement, David Kroll, a chemist and blogger, asked to interview Monica.<sup>2</sup> It was fascinating to see Monica's perspectives on life–work–school balance issues.

I believe the scientific community would benefit from better aligning the acceptance of open discussion of these issues with their importance. One study has revealed that more than two-thirds of faculty are partnered with someone else working outside the home and more than a third are partnered with another academic.<sup>3</sup> Two-career issues are important and even central to many women and men, can be very challenging to solve, and would be better handled with more open information and less stigma. ■

—Jeremy Berg, University of Pittsburgh

### Footnotes and Reference

<sup>1</sup> [www.nigms.nih.gov/News/Results/20101206.htm](http://www.nigms.nih.gov/News/Results/20101206.htm).

<sup>2</sup> <http://cenblog.org/terra-sigillata/2011/06/22/on-being-a-teenager-with-high-powered-science-medicine-parents>.

<sup>3</sup> Schiebinger L, Henderson AD, Gilmartin SK (2008). *Dual-Career Academic Couples: What Universities Need to Know*. Stanford, CA: Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University ([http://test.clayman.gotpantheon.com/sites/default/files/DualCareerFinal\\_0.pdf](http://test.clayman.gotpantheon.com/sites/default/files/DualCareerFinal_0.pdf)).

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