

CCBIO Opinion

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The Decathlon of the Young Researcher

Performing a Pubmed search is an important daily activity for a scientist; however, not everyone realizes that we now have access to more than 26 million publications following the quasi-exponential increase in the number of indexed papers in this database over the last 10 years. Even in our own research focus, we struggle to select appropriate articles to read. Theoretically, we should be reading more than 10 to 50 papers a day! Review articles are indeed a very helpful way to get a broader picture of our own (or a related) field of interest. However, reviews are not always easy to read if you are not already an expert in the field, and many are redundant or confusing, some written by non-experts that are neither informative nor accurate, and often tainted by a degree of plagiarism of another recent review. For young investigators, the array of information available in the literature becomes so overwhelming that most cannot really triage what is relevant for their research. Artificial intelligence-based categorization has not yet been established to rationalize the results or provide advanced mechanistic insight or a robust platform upon which we can engage in new projects. Mentors need to organize brain-storm sessions to help young researchers formulate new strategies to overcome some of these formidable issues.

Another major concern for the young scientist is career planning. Finding a tenured position in a competitive research institution is a major challenge. The CNS (Cell/Nature/Science) syndrome has spread worldwide, and so, constructing a curriculum vitae with a list of publications in high impact factor journals is a real nightmare for most young academics. Obviously, one should try to attain a very good postdoctoral fellowship in a reputable laboratory that frequently publishes in these high-profile journals. The temptation is indeed to do everything possible to provide the head of the laboratory with an exciting manuscript, sometimes needing to cosmetize the results so that they are supported by the boss and in line with the tone of the journal. In rare cases, cosmetics are insufficient, and some resort to fabricating part of their results. The next challenge for the young investigator is then to assemble a team and secure sufficient funding for a quick start.

How to train these young scientists at CCBIO is a challenge; but, clearly, there are good opportunities in this non-stressful environment. The visiting professors have certainly a role to play in this important mission. ••