Meet Jorge Díaz-Garzón

Jorge Díaz-Garzón is a resident from La Paz University Hospital in Madrid, who is in his last year residency of clinical chemistry and laboratory medicine. He received an IFCC grant under the Professional Scientific Exchange Programme (PSEP) which provided him with financial assistance to spent 3 months of his training in the U.S. to learn all he can from Dr. Fred Apple, PhD, DABCC, Medical Director of Clinical Laboratories, and the Director of the Commission on Accreditation in Clinical Chemistry (COMACC) program at the Hennepin County Medical Center (Minneapolis, MN, USA), and Professor of Lab Medicine and Pathology at the University of Minnesota.

Jorge heard about the IFCC PSEP through the Clinical Chemistry and Laboratory Medicine Spanish Society (SEQC) and he is really grateful to Dr. Antonio Buno, MD, PhD and Head of Department of Laboratory Medicine at La Paz University Hospital in Madrid who was able to make the introduction to Dr. Apple.

The Experience is Worth the Effort

The process to receive the IFCC grant takes about a year to complete, but Jorge encourages his fellow young scientists around the globe to take part in this opportunity.

Jorge believes that this opportunity has opened up his career. He says that working with Dr. Apple has enhanced his professional acumen and deepened his understanding of how a laboratory functions, different methodologies for forensic toxicology, and on cardiac markers.

By going through the grant process and traveling to another country to work under a specific mentor, Jorge has demonstrated how serious he is about learning and developing his professional skills. This has paid off in the personal attention he receives from his mentor, Dr. Apple, who he meets with daily.

Jorge and Dr. Apple both agree that one of the greatest benefits of these internships is that it helps the young scientists decide what part of laboratory medicine they are going to work and what is right for them. “It opens their eyes to different areas,” says Dr. Apple. “In addition to academic and hospital based opportunities, there are industry jobs with pharmaceutical companies and in vitro diagnostics, it all depends their personality – what fits them best.”

These programs are beneficial to the young scientists overseas, because they give them the opportunity to gain experience in the outside of their native country. “It is a very positive thing to have the additional experience being in the U.S. to work in a research lab and understand how lab medicine works the same or differently in a United States hospital,” says Dr. Apple. “They are able to take back to their country what they learned here.”

Dr. Apple also tells us that the young scientists will “learn evidence-based lab medicine, which is used to interpret the laboratory values and their application for evaluating patients on an individualized basis – a global interest everywhere. This education gained in the U.S. will help them serve as a consultant,” Dr. Apple adds.

Jorge suggests inquiring about this program early to avoid any problems with a visa and other logistical issues. Only one young
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Dr. Apple

A Mentor’s Advice on a Successful Internship

Dr. Apple, also has some suggestions for other interested young scientists like Jorge.

1. **Put in the effort.**

   “If you don't submit an application, you have no chance,” says Dr. Apple. This same advice goes for grant applications, "you have to put in the effort and take the risk." Be serious about inquiring and participating in the program.

   To get the best out of the mentee experience, Dr. Apple gives these pointers:

   - Educate yourself on understanding the foreign U.S. healthcare system. With having knowledge of the healthcare system of your country and ours, it adds to your advantage or assesses different approaches.
   - Find an established laboratorian in the area of interest you want to work in. If you apply with another specialty, you won't gain the knowledge for the field you want.
   - Be aware you have to be somewhat independent while training in the U.S., there is quite a bit of downtime that requires independent thought.
   - Language barriers are important; you need to be able to talk to the other techs in the lab, supervisors, managers, medical students, residents and providers throughout the hospital.
   - Publish at least one or two papers per year to continue to show your added value to your administrative and consultative abilities.

2. **Make your impact**

   Dr. Apple explains, there is also a huge shift towards more interaction with clinicians and more administrative work for laboratorians. He says to Jorge and his other fellows, “if you don't have a seat at the table in the hospital, or on certain committees where decisions are being made about the labs, orderings, or how tests are ordered, you really will never impact lab medicine; your academic research publications have a different impact on clinical lab medicine practice.” All of Dr. Apple’s mentees, like Jorge, go to all of his meetings, so they are able to see and listen to what the interactions are like with the physicians, other laboratorians, and hospital administration.