

WHAT DO PHDS FROM HEALTH SCIENCES DO?

Career Portraits 2023



INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of career portraits of former PhD students from the health sciences at Aarhus University. Some of the essential questions for PhD students are often “what do PhDs actually do?” as well as “Where do they find work and what are their job positions?” This collection of career portraits seeks to answer those questions by giving 22 examples of different career paths and the considerations behind the career choices.

The collection of career portraits is the outcome of interviews conducted by PhD-students during a PhD course on Career Management Skills (CMS) held for PhD students from primarily Health in the autumn of 2023. The focus of the course was primarily on careers outside of academia, so the majority of the portraits are of PhDs working in the industry.

Enjoy the reading and we hope you will gain interesting insights as well as inspiration.

Course responsible: Vibeke Broe (AU Career PhD & JR) and The Graduate School of Health, Aarhus University 2023.

Career Portraits 2023

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PhDs working in the private sector

Søren Krogh Emanuelsen, Global Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk

By Anette Bach Jønsson



Education

2021: PhD in Health Science, Aarhus University

2016: MSc in Sport Science, SDU

2013: BSc in Nutrition and Health, VIA University College

Jobs

2022-present: Global Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk

2021- 2022: Associate Global Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk

2018-2021: PhD student at the Spinal Cord Injury Centre of Western Denmark

What kind of position do you have today?

Global Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Søren decided not to continue within academia, wishing to experience working under conditions different from those in academia. This included considerations of salary conditions, a desire to move away from grant applications and the uncertainty of fixed-term contracts. Søren had plans to relocate and find work in Copenhagen. In his second year as a PhD student, he reached out to a person through his network who held a position as a Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk. Through this connection, Søren learned about the job tasks and was inspired to apply for a similar position.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Søren started in a position as an Associate Trial Manager at Novo Nordisk after completing his PhD, where he worked on the conduct aspect of a project.

After approximately 1 year in this role, he was contacted by his manager, who informed him that Novo Nordisk was initiating a new project and needed experienced personnel in the new department. The leadership team had identified him for this opportunity, and at that time, he was open to a change. This transition meant that he now handles the initiation of new studies instead of the conduct phase.

How did you find your first job/current job?

During the PhD, Søren enrolled in AU's Career Mentor Program, where one of the tasks was to reach out to three different individuals and inquire about their career paths. Through his network, he secured a meeting with the previously mentioned individual who held a Trial Manager position. He gained insight into what the job entailed, and the qualifications valued in such a position. These qualifications aligned well with his own, prompting him to apply for the job, and he was successful in securing the position.

What contacts - if any - did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

None other than the previously mentioned individual Søren knew through his network.

Describe a typical day/week

Søren spends a lot of time on vendor management where he has frequent interactions with third parties, whom Novo Nordisk hires to manage various tasks or departments. In these meetings, Søren engages with the vendor's project managers to review the week's deadlines and to-dos. Additionally, there are more substantial tasks involving the development of various procedural documents, such as process descriptions, monitoring plans, and protocol deviations. The role of a Global Trials Manager also involves a significant amount of email correspondence between different clinical sites and our team. They conduct internal meetings within the trial squad, consisting of various specialists including statisticians, medical writers, study doctors, and data managers. Furthermore, there are weekly internal meetings with the trial management group, where they discuss focus areas and pending tasks. Biweekly, they have larger focus group meetings that cover entire areas. Here, one gains a strong sense of belonging within an otherwise very large organization. For example, they can be informed about new guidelines from management, learn about new strategies to expand production capacities, or hear about new goals for the next product.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Søren primarily uses the soft skills he acquired during his PhD, such as project management abilities, proficiency in organizing, adeptness at juggling multiple tasks while maintaining an overview,

and skills in prioritizing tasks.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

A skill that Søren didn't develop during his PhD was teamwork. This is a significant aspect of work outside academia. Also understanding one's place in the organizational framework and non-academic communication. By this, he means that we need to be able to collaborate and communicate at a high professional level with different professional groups on various topics, but not necessarily at an academic level.

What would you have done differently during your PhD – if anything - considering your current career?

Søren finds this a bit difficult to answer given that his current job is so different from the topic he worked on during his PhD. He doesn't think he would actually change anything due to limited options to alter the course of his PhD.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Halfway through his PhD, when he started signing up for the Career Mentor Program.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Søren believes it is important to remember that academia is a very specific field and may resemble a bit of a bubble. There is a vast world outside where you can be much more relaxed about your job, and you have the ability to set expectations for your employer rather than the other way around. You can express preferences for changes in tasks, for example, and you are not solely responsible for ensuring that tasks are completed. This is a significant and, in Søren's case, very positive change compared to academia.

Bonna Leerhøy, Medical Advisor, independent consultant and board member

By Pernille Thordal Larsen



Education

2016-2018: PhD in Medicine

2013-2015: MSc in Health Science

2006-2009: BSc in Nursing

Jobs

2022-present: Board Member, Konfront ApS

2021-present: Freelance Medical Advisor, Independent Consultant

2021-present: Senior Researcher

2021: Chief Medical Officer, The HabLab, Leo Innovation Lab

2019-2021: Steering Committee Member, Copenhagen Center for Translational Research

2018-21: Head of Clinical Research, Digestive Disease Center, Bispebjerg Hospital

2018-2021: Board member, The Research Foundation for Surgery and Tissue Repair

2016-2018: Clinical Research manager

What kind of position do you have today?

Bonna is an independent consultant and medical advisor in her own freelance business. She advises companies on grant applications and research methodology and assist with data analysis and research dissemination. Further, she is a Board member at the company Konfront ApS. Konfront has developed a platform for professionals to strengthen and support the work with children and young people with mental health challenges. Meanwhile she is still affiliated to Bispebjerg Hospital and participate in research. Lastly, but not least, Bonna has also started a business as a horse breeder.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

After some very busy years both during and after her PhD, she felt it was time to move the workplace to her home and have an even more flexible work life. This made it easier to support her family while also turning her passion for horses into a part-time occupation, and still doing research. The many experiences and skills she had acquired in a relatively short period allowed her to switch gears and earn money in a new way as a consultant. She might go back to the industry or the medical research field again later, but for now she really enjoys connecting these two worlds.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

As Bonna had been highly involved in managing the Clinical research department at the Digestive Disease Center at Bispebjerg University Hospital during her PhD studies, she became head of the departments during her last year as a PhD student. As head of the department, she had a clear strategy for reaching out to the industry and initiating projects for patient groups who did not have any established effective treatments. This strategy not only helped the patients, but with a lot of research nurses affiliated who could take care of the patients, it also freed up space in the general hospital wards. Further, due to the collaboration with the industry, the research unit obtained funds, which were used to establish a research foundation at the hospital. Here Bonna had her first position as a Board member. After three years as Head of Research, she got a position as a Medical advisor at the HabLab at Leo Innovation Lab. The combination of experience with setting up clinical trials and a lot of interdisciplinary collaboration within the medical-research world and experience with the medical industry gave her both the skills and the network, that made it possible for her to start up as a freelance consultant and become a board member.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

She had a large network in the industry due to both the collaboration in the research unit and her time at the Leo Innovation Lab.

Describe a typical day/week?

Bonna works from home and shares an office with her husband. She is often out having meetings or lunches with clients.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

She benefits most of the analytic skills she gained during her PhD studies. But also knowledge on research methodology is very useful. Further, she really appreciates her experience on collaboration, as you are truly dependent on collaborators within the research area.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

She has taken courses on board work, as she lacked knowledge regarding legal obligations etc. Otherwise, it is mostly an attitude change she has developed – during her PhD-studies she wanted the highest level of evidence in everything and was probably a bit less uncompromising. During the years, she believe she has become a bit softer – RCT's cannot explain everything and we need different perspectives.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Bonna published five articles during her PhD. With a few more articles she could have qualified for a Dr. Med dissertation instead. She wishes she had prioritized that. Otherwise, she wishes she had gained more skills within data management and biostatistics. She is not without skills in the area, but she doesn't feel qualified to consult others within this area.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

She was very involved in the research strategy early in her PhD studies, so the next step after her PhD came naturally.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

"Be kind and more inclusive". Bonna believes the research world needs more interaction across professions and across research teams. We have such great opportunities for innovation in Denmark, but too often, the possibilities to help patients are hindered by conflicts among the researchers due to a desire to make money or achieve high H-index scores. There is nothing wrong with earning money – but you can do that while still having integrity.

Søs Neergaard-Petersen, Senior International Medical Manager at Novo Nordisk

By Vanaja Kumarasegaram



Education

2015: PhD, Dept. of Cardiology and Dept. of Clinical Biochemistry, Aarhus University Hospital
2009: Medical Doctor, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Senior International Medical Manager, Novo Nordisk
2021-2023: Global Medical Manager, Novo Nordisk
2015-2021: Medical Doctor

What kind of position do you have today?

Today I work as a Senior International Medical Manager at Novo Nordisk.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

During my PhD and previous research years, I fell in love with working with research and I wanted to continue this. The pharma industry and being able to bring actual medicine to the patients was more attractive to me than an academic research career. After starting the specialization program in Clinical Biochemistry, I realized that I missed being part of a research team and that I really thrive in a research environment.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I had an internship at the department of Cardiology and my PhD was at this department. I have also had a research year during medical school in the same department. Most of my research and my papers were involving Cardiology. When I saw a job ad from Novo Nordisk where they specifically looked for someone with working-and research knowledge

in the field of cardiology, I felt it was a perfect match for me.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I saw a job advertisement via Internal Novo Job Agent. Previously, I attended an introductory event held by Novo Nordisk before applying. I also used my network to get in contact with people already working there.

What contacts - if any - did you have at the company/ workplace/ university before you started?

A family member of mine worked at Novo Nordisk but otherwise, it was mainly an unexplored field to me.

Describe a typical day/week?

Meetings with International collaboration partners, internal organisation at Novo Nordisk both as part of Clinical Drug Development, and external with academic collaborators Europe and US. Internal meeting planning for the clinical trials including writing protocol and planning execution of trial together with clinical operations, biostatistics, regulatory affairs, Safety operation etc. (case report forms, investigator meetings, management meetings at Novo Nordisk).

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Scientific and medical expertise, planning and executing a clinical trial, lab experience, medical expertise scientifically and practically from clinics/hospital, and project management and organization.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Understanding Clinical Drug Development in large scale global studies with more than 500 sites and in various countries. Pharma and Clinical Drug Development is a specialization itself and limited info on this during both medical school and PhD/research life.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

I would not have done anything different during my PhD, except dare to be more open to my

colleagues about my considerations about a career in Clinical Drug Development in Novo Nordisk, and not seeing myself spending my life in a hospital after the PhD.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Not until the last 6 months for real, but of course I reflected a bit during my time as a PhD student.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Apply for the job you want and makes sense to you and your entire life and family situation. Do what you dream for (yet be realistic). I did what was expected of me (pursuing hospital doctor specialisation path initially) So happy I finally made it to my dream of doing research and Drug Development, hence being part of teams bringing innovation and treatments to patients.

Anne Katrine Bolvig Sørensen, Nutrition Scientist at Arla Innovation Center

By Fie Langmann



What kind of position do you have today?

Anne Katrine works as a nutrition scientist at Arla Innovation Center. Her focus lies in adding value to the milk provided by farmers. She aids in creating products that consumers love while also steering Arla towards a strategic direction, emphasizing health in Arla's products rather than just consumer preference. Part of her role involves generating internal knowledge and research. Presently, she's working on a white paper regarding milk's role in health and sustainability. This white paper aims to educate internally and elucidate dairy's role, contributing to marketing strategies and campaigns. Externally, Arla is involved in research as point of contact in Arla Food for Health projects and other projects where Arla contributes e.g. with products or in-kind contributions. Anne Katrine's role in these projects is to follow the project and ensure translation of the obtained knowledge is implemented into the business. Anne Katrine finds satisfaction in her job because her contributions to the company internally hold more weight than external contributions, such as publications.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Given ample funding, Anne Katrine would have remained in her team leader position at the Danish Cancer Society.

Academia demands a high level of independence, which didn't align with Anne Katrine's preference for team-oriented work. Working on tangible projects with concrete outcomes, such as reducing sugar content in dairy products for children, was more motivating.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job? How did you find your first job/current job?

Anne Katrine's experience as a team leader at the Danish Cancer Society gave her the confidence to apply for a nutrition scientist position at Arla Foods, which she secured. Her prior experience at Unisense provided her with valuable business understanding, a benefit she brought to her role at Arla Foods. She notes that while her current job emphasizes specialist skills, both specialist and generalist skills are needed at Arla Innovation Center. During her job search, differentiating between the skill requirements for various positions was challenging.

What contacts - if any - did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Anne Katrine had no prior contacts at Arla Innovation Center before applying. However, some former classmates from her MSc program worked at Arla Food Ingredients and spoke positively about it.

Education

2016: PhD in Animal Science (Human Nutrition), Aarhus University

2010: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs

2018-present: Nutrition Scientist, Arla Innovation Center, Aarhus

2016-2018: Team leader, Danish Cancer Society, Aarhus

After participating in an open house course at Arla Innovation Center, she decided to apply for the position.

Describe a typical day/week?

Anne Katrine has outlined her day based on her calendar:

8-8.30: Team check-in for updates and information sharing.

8.30-9: Preparation for a meeting on product enrichment - uncommon in Denmark.

9-10: Meeting with the marketing manager to discuss Arla Denmark's strategy.

10-10.30: Assisted a coworker with a poster and nutritional calculations.

10.30-11: Organization-wide meeting for updates on budgets and projects.

12-12.30: Lunch

11-13: Planning necessary research activities for Arla.

13-14: Provided feedback to coworkers from the FENS-conference in Belgrade on Nov 2023.

14-16: Online seminar on Milk fat globule membranes

Working at Arla Innovation Center involves collaboration across professions in a non-hierarchical structure where senior managers seek input from junior employees.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

The ability to swiftly acquire new knowledge, analyze, interpret, and build upon existing knowledge,

as well as working in a structured and goal-oriented manner, are crucial. It would be impossible to

qualify the inputs to the business without having the scientific know-how from a PhD.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Throughout her PhD, Anne Katrine did not cultivate a grasp of business intricacies, nor did

she exercise the ability to consider different future scenarios, e.g. how to develop products if the consumer segment changed drastically. At the Arla Innovation Center, there exists an entire department dedicated solely to studying consumer behavior, predicting trends, and aligning strategies accordingly. This involves comprehending future scenarios to anticipate present actions necessary to achieve defined objectives in the forthcoming 5-6 years.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Reflecting back, Anne Katrine wishes she had engaged more with external networks or organizations beyond academia during her PhD to broaden her perspective.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Anne Katrine had some thoughts during her PhD but only seriously considered job options about three months before completing her thesis due to time constraints.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Anne Katrine found having a job mentor while working at Unisense invaluable and suggests seeking mentors through organizations like Dansk Magisterforening if unsure about future career paths. Coming from a business-oriented environment at Unisense, her initial uncertainty about pursuing a PhD stemmed from concerns about aligning her preferences for working on tangible goals, in a team and with room for sparring with colleagues etc. However, her decision was facilitated by conversations with her mentor who supported her in taking the step back to academia. The PhD project turned out to have a very supportive and engaging team, easing the shift from a stable job to the uncertainties of academia, and turning down all the worries of working alone on a nerdy PhD project no one cared about. Reflecting on this, Anne Katrine emphasizes the significance of a strong PhD project team. Engaging in networks, both personal and others', managerial experience, and developing distinguishing skills are highly recommended for standing out in the job market. Bridging academic learning

with real-world leadership in industry can help showcasing adaptability and skills gained

during the PhD and open doors to a career path beyond academia.

Anonymous, Principle Investigator at Pharma Research

By Johanna Laura Heinz



Education

PhD: Molecular Biomedicine

Diploma: Molecular Biomedicine

Jobs

2 years: Head of laboratory, German Pharma Company

5 years: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Fortune500 Pharma Company, USA

1 year: Researcher at a University in Germany

6 years: Researcher at a University in Germany

What kind of position do you have today?

Principle Investigator (Lab Head in Pharma Research)

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Most importantly, to have a direct impact on drug development rather than having a chance that maybe a company would pick up on my published ideas eventually. On top of that, to be able to openly collaborate without having to be afraid that someone might steal the idea to publish it themselves. Also, the publication system is flawed since scientists have to publish to proceed in their career, which is reflected in the quality and reproducibility of the papers, and as a future PI, I did not want to be responsible for PhD students not being able to get financial compensation due to grants running out with not replacement. Finally, career perspectives and job security in academia are insufficient, paths to a permanent position are dominated by politics.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Yes, as a Postdoc/Scientist at the institution of my PhD lab and then a Postdoc at Fortune500 Pharma Company in California.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Applied to a job posting for the position. Additionally, I wrote to the hiring manager at Fortune500 Pharma Company directly. I got his name and e-mail by researching the topic of interest, he was listed as corresponding author on his publications.

Was finding your current job different from finding your first job? Did you find it more difficult or easier?

It was easier. At that point I had very high credentials and could basically pick the job I wanted (Fortune500 Pharma Company is one of the most famous pharma for research-based jobs within the pharma world).

Did you have contacts in the workplace before you started? If so, which and did they help you land the job?

No, I landed the jobs myself. In both cases, it was completely independent of contacts.

Describe a typical day or week in your current job?

I will answer e-mails that arrived overnight from our US branch/contract research organizations (CROs) and take care of arising questions of my team.

I also have project meetings, need to prepare presentations in various forums, give the presentations, and do budget management, technology research, consultation with teams, and managing /planning more meetings. Sometimes, there is some hands-on work in the lab, even though that happens too rare for my taste. The rest of my time is spent with data analysis, interpretation, and management of CROs.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

The scientific background knowledge I gained, the scientific way of thinking to always question everything, or at least have in the back of your mind that things might just be different than established. Also, project management skills as I always worked on 4-5 own projects, presentation skills including knowing your audience, tailor presentation to your audience and always give everyone credit. Knowing that projects can fail and realizing the time point when they fail and should be stopped.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Collaboration in a large matrix organization, proper reporting structures, realizing that project failure is not own failure and behaving accordingly, presenting to a non-expert audience (it will never be experts once you leave your PhD lab), budget management, people management, getting the opinion from experts rather than brewing your own thing, accepting that for a project to succeed, it needs a lot of people.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Getting out of there faster and having more confidence. Don't believe the "academia is the only true scientific place" doctrine. You can very much conduct top-notch science in the private sector! There are scientific light houses – mostly in the US (Boston, New York, San Francisco, San Diego). I would have done the PhD there instead of Europe.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

3 years before I started my PhD. To me, it was always the goal to perform research in pharma.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Most importantly: You gained the foundation to work as an independent scientist. This does not mean that you are ready to work productively right off the bat. You will still need some kind of apprenticeship. Understand and accept that there is no pride to be lost by starting out in what might seem an "entry level job". You will still be proceeding faster than peers staying in academia. Get "a" job rather than trying to land "the" job. When staying in academia: Leave the country you've done your PhD in. Or at least go to research institutions like MPI or TMU, EMBEL or DKFZ (at that point: The more famous, the better). There are tons of jobs outside of research where you can work in. Identifying the one you want to work in is hard. Getting the job not so much – understand that the hardest part is to make up your mind. Then set goals to fulfil requirements. Investing one more year in that is nothing compared to hanging around your PhD lab for too long. Publications are important for academic career planning, not so much in the private sector. Here, we value job experience.

Signe Holm Larsen, Senior International Medical Manager at Novo Nordisk

By Mona Kristiansen



Education

2021: Doctor of Medical Science, Aarhus University

2009: PhD in Health Science, Aarhus University

2008: MSc in Medicine, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Senior International Medical Manager at Novo Nordisk

2020- 2021: Consultant at Rigshospitalet

2021-present: Senior Researcher,

2014-2020: Cardiology Training at Aarhus University Hospital

What kind of position do you have today?

Signe is a Senior International Medical Manager at Novo Nordisk. She is using her research background by contributing scientific knowledge to future research projects at Novo Nordisk. She also gives input to research projects already being conducted.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

In 2023, Signe decided to apply for a job at Novo Nordisk. She found it difficult to combine her interest in research with her clinical work as a doctor. She missed having more time for creativity, working together as a team and driving projects forward as a group and thus, she decided to work for Novo Nordisk.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Signe has been involved in research in congenital heart disease since 2003. Signe completed her PhD studies in 2009 and decided to become a cardiologist specialized in congenital heart disease. She specialized further during her clinical fellowships in London (2016 – 2017) and Toronto (2019 – 2020). After her cardiology training at Aarhus University Hospital, she was employed as a doctor for 2,5 years at Rigshospitalet.

While pursuing her clinical career as a cardiologist, she also continued the research in congenital heart disease, and in 2021 she handed in her doctoral thesis.

How did you find your current job?

Signe became aware of the position at Novo Nordisk when she noticed the job ad on LinkedIn.

What contacts - if any - did you have at the company before you started?

Signe did not have any close contacts at Novo Nordisk before she started.

Describe a typical day?

The days are flexible, and Signe is highly responsible for her own time management. The work primarily consists of meetings and office work. She can work from home 2 days/week.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Signe finds that she benefits from analytical thinking and the ability to think independently from her long-standing research experience.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

The language and culture are different in a company such as

Novo Nordisk as compared to the university or hospital. As a PhD student, you are highly responsible for the research yourself. On the contrary, in a big company, the set-up is much bigger, and you work together as part of a large group in order to the projects to succeed.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

It is crucial to maintain a sense of curiosity towards the potential career opportunities that may arise. It is important not to cling too tightly to a specific career idea, but to keep in mind that there are numerous paths in life.

Mette Damborg Hansen, Chief Consultant at Plant2Food

By Jette Steinbach



Education

2017: PhD: Public Health, Aarhus University
2009: MSc: Cand. Scient.San, Master of Health Science, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Chief Consultant at Plant2Food, Aarhus University
2018-2023: Senior Project Leader at SEGES Innovation
2017-2018: Nutrition Consultant at Findus Sverige

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a chief consultant at the Open Innovation in Science (OIS) centre and a program manager at Plant2Food.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Since I was enrolled as a PhD student, I knew that I wanted a job with a higher pace where I could interact with other people, instead of sitting at a desk in an office all day long. Transitioning to industry was therefore an obvious career path for me from the early stages of my career. The position at Plant2Food was an exciting new platform where I could use many of the experiences I had from previous positions. It enabled me to combine administrative work and outreach.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

After my PhD, I found it difficult to transition from academia to industry. I started working as a nutrition consultant at Findus Sverige, where I taught on the nutrition of individuals at risk of undernutrition. I did not really use my scientific research skills, and the position mainly served as a steppingstone. Within a year, I found a new position as a senior project leader at SEGES Innovation. Here, I had a variety of tasks and got many new experiences.

I planned workshops, explored problems and their underlying challenges, and provided the right solutions for these challenges. I was also responsible for applying for grants and securing funding.

How did you find your current job?

Plant2Food is a platform sponsored by the Novo Nordisk Foundation. The application was written by the OIS centre in collaboration with other universities and companies. I was asked to give feedback on the application during the writing process, which made me aware of this upcoming initiative. I kept an eye out for job advertisements in connection with the Plant2Food platform, because I thought that a position at the OIS center could be really interesting. When I saw that Plant2Food had an open position that combined both secretarial work and matchmaking, I knew that I had to apply for the job.

What contacts - if any - did you have at the company before you started?

I did not have any contacts at Findus Sverige, SEGES Innovation or Plant2Food before I started there. I simply applied for the jobs that were advertised.

Describe a typical day/week?

As a chief consultant, I communicate with many individuals in the value chain.

I have meetings with startup companies and my collaborator at Food & Bio Cluster Denmark to help the startups find the right national and international experts and to increase their visibility. During these meetings, we examine the startup's needs and challenges, who they want to collaborate with, what they can provide and how they can use the Plant2Food platform to reach out and pitch their ideas. I also participate in food fairs on plant-based food to meet and talk to the manufacturers and the consumers. I want to know what their current challenges are, and what Plant2Food can do to help them overcome these challenges. Besides that, I also communicate with coworkers and companies about the Plant2Food calls, which includes sending grant and decision letters, as well as preparing and travelling to meetings and conferences.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Communicating both verbally and in writing in a precise and correct way is one of the skills I use every day. I communicate both in Danish and English, switching between both languages constantly. Due to the regular Plant2Food calls, I also use my knowledge about how to structure and write a scientific paper, an abstract, and other scientific writings. Managing projects, meeting deadlines, being prepared and staying updated are other important skills I gained during my PhD. My academic knowledge helps me understand and evaluate research proposals. It also enables me to better understand the researchers that approach the Plant2Food platform for funding. I can help them and make the application process more accessible.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

I got really skilled at project management and fundraising during my employment at SEGES Innovation. SEGES Innovation is a consultant business, and it is therefore highly dependent on project funds. I was employed at SEGES Innovation only if I had funds for my projects. This gave me valuable knowledge about how to read and understand a foundation's guidelines, how to decide on the right foundation to apply for funding at, what to apply for and how to formulate an application. In addition,

I gained experience in developing and complying with a budget.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

I would not have done anything differently.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

From the beginning of my PhD, I knew that I needed a job where I could spend some time outside of the office. It was obvious to me that I had to move away from pure research.

In your opinion, what benefits and disadvantages does a career in non-academia have?

One important aspect of research is that all results have to be correct. Researchers must have valid evidence for their claims, and they usually invest a lot of time to produce valid and correct research. This is especially important in academia as invalid results can have very severe consequences for society. In industry, it is usually as important to produce correct results as in academia, but with less time available. This means that researchers in academia often have more time to produce valuable results, and to ensure that the evidence supports the proposed claims. On the other hand, the faster pace in industry can be beneficial, as employees are less likely to feel stuck with the same problem for weeks or months.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

I think it is important to consider what you like to do, what you are good at, and what gives you energy. Try to find out as soon as possible what you really want to do – whether it is research or something completely different. When I finished my PhD, I did not know myself well enough. I was never really challenged or in really deep waters before I transitioned to the private sector. It was only when I moved away from academia that I got to know myself, what makes my work life meaningful, and also what I don't care about. Another thing I learned after my PhD is that it is really important to have some good managers.

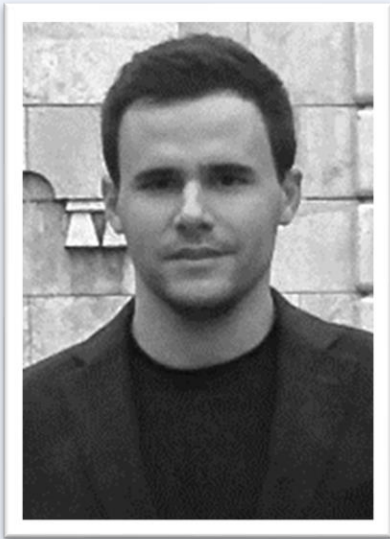
What was a challenge you faced when you transitioned from academia to industry?

When I was invited for job interviews, I was often asked whether I would actually be able to work in industry with a pure research CV. But I have a lot of energy and I really enjoy meeting people and communicating, and I really tried to

show that in the job interview. I told them that I have the drive and that I want to get out and meet people. I was just tired of sitting at my own desk, and I needed to get out of the yellow brick walls.

Henrique Fernandes, Tech Lead - Data Science and AI at BESTSELLER

By Ana Teresa Queiroga



Education

2012-2015: PhD in Health Sciences
2002-2005: BSc and MSc in Biomedical Engineering

Jobs

2023-present: Tech Lead - Data Science & AI
2022-2023: Senior Data Scientist, BESTSELLER
2019-2023: Assistant Professor, Aarhus University
2017-2019: Postdoctoral Researcher, Aarhus University
2015-2017: Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Oxford

What kind of position do you have today?

Henrique works as Tech Lead – Data Science and AI at BESTSELLER.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Henrique left academia because of several factors. He sought stability for his family, believing it was unattainable in academia, even with a permanent position. His desire was to achieve financial independence based on his skills. Moreover, he disliked the isolation and destructive competition within academia, feeling it hindered his professional and scientific growth. Henrique also noted a lack of professional recognition from mentors and collaborators in his academic career.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Henrique's prior experiences include roles such as an R&D engineer at a biosensor startup and an IT consultant before entering academia. These positions significantly influenced his decision to leave academia, as they provided him with an understanding of the external work environment and its pace, giving him insights into what to expect in an industry job.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Henrique found it through a job post on LinkedIn that was referred

to him by someone in his network. After reading the post, Henrique called the Data Analytics department at BESTSELLER, and following a good conversation on the phone, Henrique submitted his CV. This was followed by 3 or 4 interviews, ultimately resulting in the job offer.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Henrique had no prior contacts at BESTSELLER.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical workday for Henrique starts around 8:30 AM by the time he arrives at the office and prepares the daily backlog meeting at 8:45 AM with the data science team (about 10/12 people). In this relatively short meeting, the team members provide descriptions and/or updates on tasks from the previous day and outline what they will be working on that day. Following that, Henrique has meetings with project owners to discuss and align requests for the data science team. He creates plans and establishes strategies in collaboration with different departments. He also engages in meetings with other team members to discuss how to execute specific tasks and prioritize work. Throughout a typical day, Henrique also takes time to design the architecture of solutions.

Every week, Henrique has two hours allocated for learning new skills, and every other week, there are knowledge-sharing sessions where an employee presents a topic of their choice. Henrique also has weekly meetings with the University students he supervises where he guides them and assesses the progress of the project.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today? Resilience in high-pressure situations. Henrique feels that this is something that colleagues sometimes lack at the same level because in academia, there are situations of much greater pressure (due to limited resources and limited mentoring). Henrique also mentioned problem-solving and creativity (in academia, there are fewer resources in a very specific topic, so it is necessary to generate original ideas).

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Henrique highlighted a desire for increased exposure to project management, expanded networking opportunities beyond our department, and enhanced multidisciplinary interaction within the University. Additionally, he identified a need for more technical guidance, encompassing tools, code versioning, and data versioning. Henrique emphasized the importance of structured learning and mentoring. Lastly, he suggested improving alignment between PhD objectives and educational offerings, along with providing greater financial support for travel.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Henrique would have shifted his focus away from specialization. He would have been more interested in emerging technology and developing technical skills, particularly everything related to coding – for example from code versioning to pre-commit hooks and cloud computing. However, Henrique mentioned that he wouldn't change much, as it was crucial for reaching where he is today. He suggested that he might have been a bit more selfish, doing less than what others asked of him, and focusing more on personal development and individual goals.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

During the PhD, Henrique knew that he wanted to continue in academia because he enjoyed what he was doing. However, in his last year in academia, he began to feel that he was limiting his horizons and that there might be other places where he could feel more fulfilled, even outside of neuroscience.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

More Networking: connect with people outside your field to explore other things you might enjoy doing. Proactivity: seek additional learning in different areas, taking the initiative to explore and take risks — within reason, as a PhD project is time-consuming. Persistence: don't give up and seize opportunities without fear of failure.

Michelle Thomsen, Product owner at QIAGEN



By Jacob Storgaard

What kind of position do you have today?

Michelle is a product owner at QIAGEN.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Michelle did not have a thought-out plan of going into the private sector when she finished her PhD. Initially she contemplated working at a hospital as a researcher. However, after handing in her PhD, she was academia-fatigued and went traveling. Here, she found out that she wanted to pursue something else, outside the yellow bricks.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which?

No jobs before this one.

How did you find your first job/current job?

During Michelle's PhD study, she also took the course "Prepare yourself on the movement from a PhD in Health to a career in non-academia". Another student had interviewed a woman from QIAGEN named Bodil. This made Michelle aware of the potential of working outside of academia while staying in Aarhus. When she returned from traveling, she simply googled QIAGEN, found a person from the company she could contact and asked if they had any open positions.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

During the PhD course "Prepare yourself on the movement from a PhD in Health to a career in non-academia", someone made a career portrait on a woman from QIAGEN. But Michelle did not know anyone personally at QIAGEN.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical week for Michelle consists of a lot of contact with customers who are using the product, which she is the "product owner" of. The feedback from the customers is then relayed by Michelle to the programmers updating the product. Because of her experience from her PhD, she can act as a bridge between the customers and the people making/updating the product. Her main focus is understanding which tasks are important and should be prioritized. This includes what gives the most value and worth for the customers.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

A skill Michelle acquired during her PhD is the drive to push a project forward. This combined with the ability to tackle complex tasks while keeping an overview has been very useful in her current position.

Education

2022: PhD: Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

2018: MSc: Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

Jobs

2022-present: Product Owner, QIAGEN

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

The whole "business-mindset" is something Michelle had to learn when she started at QIAGEN. A company needs to make money – otherwise, people will be laid off. The ability to navigate through business politics is also something Michelle did not learn during her PhD and took some time to get accustomed to.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Looking back, there is nothing in particular Michelle would have done differently during

her PhD.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

After handing in her PhD, Michelle went traveling suffering from a bit of "academia-fatigue". Coming back, she had realized she did not want to continue in academia – at least for now.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Take your time and remember to listen to yourself. What do you actually want to do? Figure this out before searching for jobs.

Thaís Marcelino – Research Scientist at Novo Nordisk

By *Fabília Helo Cavicchioli
Sugiyama*



Education

2023: PhD in Nanoscience, Aarhus University

2020: MSc: Biosciences, Sao Paulo State University

Jobs

2023-present: Research Scientist at Novo Nordisk

2019: Regulatory Affairs Internship, ABL Antibióticos do Brasil Ltda · Internship

What kind of position do you have today?

Research scientist

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

I like to be in the laboratory, but I did not see myself becoming a professor, writing grants, or orientating – I want to have a life outside of work. A company has defined working hours, and it is not necessary to work on weekends. It is also stressful, but it is different. I knew that I wanted to work in a company.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

No, this is my first job. I worked as an intern before, but actually, this is my first job. I liked it more when I worked in the company as an intern because the duties and working hours were well established.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I saw the job opening on LinkedIn.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/ university before you started?

I knew someone who had worked with me in the laboratory, and she was working at the Novo Nordisk. I got in contact with her and asked her to recommend me.

Describe a typical day/week?

I am doing several trainings, some virtual, some readings, and some practical with my team members. I have update meetings, meetings to discuss the projects, and meetings with the department and team members. I write reports to verify that products meet company specifications. I update study protocols to follow good manufacturing practices. In summary, my typical week involves a lot of data analysis.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Critical thinking (analyze and report data, statistical), communication, and presentation.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD, which you have developed afterwards?

I use most of the skills that I have learned during my PhD, but what I notice is stronger teamwork than in academia. I work in a scientific department, but I have learned more about pharmaceutical processes and production.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

My bachelor's degree is in pharmaceuticals, and I was able to apply a lot of things that I learned during my undergraduate studies –

but most of the techniques, processes, studies, and methods, I developed during my PhD. Furthermore, my PhD was quite multidisciplinary, which helped me a lot.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

I started thinking about my next steps a year before finishing my PhD. I started attending career fairs and workshops to learn how to write a resume.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Do not leave it until the last minute, and start looking for and applying once a week to jobs you would like to work on. Additionally, look for the tools that the university offers, and participate in career fairs and mentoring. At fairs, you can ask what they look for in a candidate or even tell them your profile and ask where you could fit into that company. Use all

the tools and contacts you have. Knowing someone or knowing someone who can refer you – even though the company's system, can make a difference.

What is the difference between doing research in academia and industry?

I work in the research and development area, but not the initial one (where people stay in the laboratory). I participate more in project management in the more theoretical part. The biggest difference is the high level of collaboration. In the company, there is one team for one project.

Do you need to know how to speak Danish?

No. The main language here is English, so it is essential that you know English, but not Danish.

Were you asked by publications?

It makes no difference to the CV.

Michał Świtnicki, Expert Data Scientist at Asseco Poland

By Carmen Oroperv



Education

2012-2015: PhD in Bioinformatics from Aarhus University

2009-2010: MSc in Bioinformatics from University of Glasgow

Jobs

2023- present: Expert Data Scientist at Asseco Poland

2021-2023: Senior Data Scientist at Asseco Poland

2019-2021: Data Scientist at Asseco Poland

2015-2019: Postdoctoral Fellow at Aarhus University

2017-2019: Bioinformatics Specialist at Polish Academy of Sciences (Freelance)

2011-2012: Early Stage Researcher at Helmholtz Zentrum München

2011: Short term researcher at Polish Academy of Sciences

What kind of position do you have today?

Michał currently works as an Expert Data Scientist at Asseco Poland, which is the largest IT company in Poland. He joined the company in 2019 as a Data Scientist, and over the last four years, he has built up the data science processes and team from scratch. His work focuses on applying machine learning and AI to a wide range of problems that their clients from the public sector approach them with. Among other areas, he is developing fraud prediction models for the public social insurance system. His work entails developing data science solutions from beginning to end - from finding leads and patterns in the data to deploying predictive models into production.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

After the PhD studies, the natural next step for Michał was to pursue a postdoctoral position where he could continue to carry out research projects in the area of computational omics. Even though he enjoyed working in academia, he always had an interest in business processes and was curious about how he could apply his skills in the industry. When his family needed to relocate back to Poland in 2019, he decided to look for a general data scientist position in the industry. This transition required him to identify his transferable skills and apply them in a completely new setting, but he quickly realized that he enjoys the challenges,

flexibility, quick pace, and the broad development possibilities that the industry offers.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

The data scientist position in Asseco Poland, which was Michał's first job position after leaving academia, led him to his current position as an Expert Data Scientist at the same company. This development came naturally as he demonstrated good results in his work and was open to taking on more managerial tasks as the data science team grew.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Through network. Michał shared with his network that he was open for a new position and one of his contacts forwarded his information to Asseco Poland, after which he was contacted by the company.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Besides knowing the CEO of the Asseco Poland from media and public interviews, Michał had no prior contacts at the company. close to half of his time on code development, model building and testing. The second half of his time consists of various administrative and managerial tasks, such as client communication, project management, and mentoring junior team members.

He also consciously takes time to learn and stay up to date with the new developments in his field.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Almost all theoretical knowledge and technical skills regarding programming, data science, data visualization, and machine learning that Michał acquired during the PhD are applied in his day-to-day work. He also finds that the PhD project work gave him the confidence that he can tackle difficult problems. Even if the task at hand is new to him, he can identify resources for solving the problem and come up with new ideas for solutions. Lastly, he values the presentation skills he gained during the PhD. The ability to present his work clearly and confidently is invaluable when communicating with clients and team-members.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Technical skills regarding relational databases, containerization, and code deployment. In addition, knowledge of agile practices, business processes, project management and team leadership.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Spent more time on developing skills for code packaging, production, and deployment, and putting more focus on being able to create high quality code that can be seamlessly applied in practice.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

In the end of his PhD, Michael chose to stay in the same department for a postdoctoral position. Towards the end of the postdoc, he began to plan his return to Poland, which led him to secure a new position even before finishing in Denmark. This process took about 2-3 months.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Do not be afraid to change paths. Your first job does not have to be your dream job, but you will never know before you try it out. Aim to find a place that aligns with your values and people with whom you resonate. Even if you lack some specific skills, be open to trying new things and know that you can learn along the way. Diverse professional and even personal experiences may eventually add up in surprising ways.

Dinesh Neupane, Assistant Scientist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

By Rajan Shrestha



Education

2017: PhD in Public Health (Community based hypertension management) at Aarhus University,

2012: MSc in Public Health at SDU

Jobs

2018-present: Assistant Scientist, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

2017-2018: Post-doctoral fellow (NCD), Duke Kunshan University, China

What kind of position do you have today?

Currently, I have 3 positions. I am working as assistant scientist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. I also work as visiting professor at University of Southern Denmark and Torrens University, Australia.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

My work is focused on Nepal and global health. I have an interest in academia. My passion is to be focused on low-cost approaches which can have meaningful outcome. So, I chose to go in this direction.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I started working as post doc fellow after my PhD. Then, I joined Hopkins in 2018 and I am still working in Academia.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I explored post doc job through Google. Regarding the current job, I had explored the job opportunity through web and applied and got selected in Hopkins.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

I have also worked with one of the faculty members at Hopkins in some projects before joining in as faculty staff.

Describe a typical day/week?

I usually spend my days in grant application writing, mentoring and teaching students, attending meetings with international collaborators, and doing administrative, technical as well as funding management in different projects.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Independent work that I have done during my PhD, has helped me a lot to explore my strengths and weaknesses, which is helping me in my current career. Scientific writing skills that I learned during my PhD have also helped me a lot.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

I think few of the skills that I have developed after completing my PhD are funding application writing, networking, collaboration etc.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

I don't think I would have done anything differently.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

I started thinking about my next career during my PhD study.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Don't give up your interest and passion. Consistent approaches will give you good

results. Continuity is the key to success. You need to follow your interest. Personally, I am impressed and have respect with the people who really work. Be nice with everyone.

Janus Asbjørn Schatz- Jakobsen, Project Manager and Researcher at Sejet Planteforædling



By Martin Vincent Gobry

What kind of position do you have today?

Janus is project manager and researcher at Sejet Planteforædling, a plant breeding company. He is now hired permanently and collaborates with different partners to breed and optimize crops like faba beans, wheat, and barley. His role as manager is to make sure that the deliverables match expectations and to keep track of the advances made. He also performs data collection in the fields using drones and data analysis.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Janus enjoyed fundamental research and his PhD, but also felt a lot of stress from his work in Academia. These stress problems mostly decided him to go to try to see how well he could do in the industry.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to his current job?

After his PhD, he spent a year as a high school teacher in a technical gymnasium in Skanderborg but found it stressful too. It is also hard to get a permanent position as a teacher without specialized education, so he started searching for more job possibilities at this time.

How did you find your first job/current job?

He found his job by chatting with a former student who works at the firm, and ended up sending them his CV. The company contacted him shortly after, and he got the job.

Describe a typical day/week?

There is no actual typical day or week – the work type differs depending on the project and follows the seasons and different needs associated with them. For example, during the growing period, Janus could be out in the fields flying drones, and doing data analysis. Workdays' length varies, sow and harvest season is hectic and busy, but in the winter, the field work is slower, and the work life balance is easier to keep. He is involved in different projects, mostly with industrial partners or academic groups, in which he has an advisory role and therefore often needs to meet online.

What skills and experiences from his PhD studies does he have the most benefit of today?

It took him a few months to realize why he was hired, and it is mainly because of skills developed during his PhD: his experience with wet lab and knowledge of protein function, as well as his ability to acquire information in a short time and compiling it into something useful.

Education

2016: PhD in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

2013: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs

2019-present: Project manager and researcher, Sejet Planteforædling

2018-2018: Biology teacher, Teknisk Gymnasium Skanderborg

2017-2018: Post doc in structural biology, MBG AU

2016-2017: Research assistant at MBG and Biomedicine, AU

The company knew that NGTs (New Genomic Techniques) and CRISPR were becoming the new big thing, and they needed someone that could understand mutations in a precise way.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Project management was definitely something that he had to develop at the company, structuring time and making sure that things got done before deadlines. He mostly learned from other talented project managers, but also maybe a little by being a father of two. He also had to learn high throughput phenotyping, drone flying, and image collection and analysis applied to crop improvement.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

He would have liked to follow more courses on data science or computer science, because that would help him a lot with his current job.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Perhaps halfway through the PhD, when stress symptoms showed up and he felt the need to do something different after he was done.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Grow a good network and keep it!

What kind of skill sets or profile is the company looking for right now?

Sejet Planteforædling is a rather small company, so each employee needs to cover an area of expertise. A new recruit right now would be someone with a skill set that covers data analysis or computer science.

Simin Berenji, Medical Content Specialist at Novo Nordisk

By Olivia Wagman



What kind of position do you have today?

Simin is a Medical Content Specialist. As a Medical Content Specialist, she uses her scientific knowledge and experience to advice and co-develop the content for the investigator and results meetings in different disease areas in Novo Nordisk.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

The fact that a job in academia depends so much on finding funding for a project. This creates a certain level of job insecurity. She needed more job security, also because this could influence her options of staying in Denmark as a foreigner. Apart from the job security, Simin felt that things were moving too slow in academia. She was interested in having a job in research, expecting to end up in an environment with a faster generation of results compared to academia.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Before her job as Medical Content Specialist, Simin had a three-year postdoctoral position at the faculty of Health (AU). During the last months of her PhD, she was busy with finishing her project and she did not have much time to search and apply for jobs. At the end of her PhD, there was a postdoc position available at the faculty of Health, and she decided to take it and continue in academia.

It was a good opportunity at that time because she could finish her PhD, knowing she would have a job right after. She also gained more experience from this and could develop more different skills than during the PhD, which turned out to be a benefit when applying for jobs in industry later on.

How did you find your first job/current job?

The job was advertised on LinkedIn and shared by someone in her network. This person was also a Medical Content Specialist, and they were looking for someone to join the team.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

A few contacts on LinkedIn worked at Novo Nordisk before she started.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical day would include organizing meetings with scientists within the company but also with stakeholders, both in Denmark and abroad. For these meetings, she needs to prepare scientific material, including all the necessary scientific information related to the clinical trials. This also includes designing and evaluating clinical trials. These meetings are important to plan and execute external meetings with healthcare professionals that will conduct the clinical trials.

Education

2016-2020: PhD in Health Sciences, Aarhus University

2011-2013: MSc in Exercise Physiology and Sport science, NTNU, Norway

Jobs

2022-Present: Medical Content Specialist, Novo Nordisk

2020-2022: Postdoctoral researcher, Health, AU

Therefore, Simin is also responsible for making sure that the information will be brought to the staff that participates in the clinical trials in a motivating way. All together, these meetings are there to ensure that the deliveries of the clinical trials comply with the company's views and regulatory framework.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

- Understanding scientific language
- Communicating scientific information to others
- Project management
- Time management
- Organization
- Collaborations
- Teamwork

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Deep knowledge about clinical trials, working with people specifically in this field, and working in a company and understanding businesses.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Simin started thinking about applying for jobs in industry 6 months before the end of the PhD, but there were also a lot of other things going on in relation to finishing the PhD. There was not much time for applying for jobs and it was a bit too hectic to start applying at that time. Just before finishing the PhD, she got a Postdoc position offered, which gave some room for her to improve skills and have more time to find a job in industry later on. Towards the end of the postdoc position, she started actively searching for jobs in industry again, this time having more time for it and also by sitting together with Vibeke.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

One main piece of advice is to build up your network during the PhD studies. Not only on LinkedIn but also by talking to people in PhD courses, conferences, PhD Day, etc. Talk to people that could have the same interests, because you never know how they can be a help later on.

PhDs working in the public sector

Vivi Gregersen, Clinical Academic at Aarhus University Hospital (AUH)

By Ester Ellegaard Sørensen



Education

2008-2012: PhD in Molecular Genetics, Aarhus University

1997-2005: MSc in Bioinformatics, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Clinical Academic, AUH

2019- 2023: QIAGEN, Software Product Owner

2017-2018: QIAGEN, Senior Bioinformatics Scientist

2013-2017: Postdoc in Molecular Genetics, Aarhus University

What kind of position do you have today?

Clinical academic since March 2023.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

My career journey has been a bit all over the place. I started with a biology bachelor's degree, but during my master's, I switched gears to bioinformatics because I was really into genetics and IT. Back in 2005, I finished my bioinformatics master's, but getting a job was tough since no one really knew what a bioinformatician was back then. The job center suggested I picked up some computer science skills while job hunting, so I did a minor degree in computer science and learned a bunch about programming and different programming languages. I took a shot and sent an unsolicited job application to the Department of Molecular Genetics in Foulum. That landed me a job as a research assistant for 3,5 years, and then I decided to dive into a PhD. Even though they offered me a regular position, I was set on the PhD route because it seemed like a better deal for job opportunities. Plus, I discovered I really enjoyed research and the freedom that came with it. After my PhD, I did a 4-year Postdoc, focusing on sequencing and genotyping.

Those skills come in handy in my current job as a clinical academic. After my Postdoc position, I got the job at QIAGEN as Senior Bioinformatics Scientist.

How did you find your current job? And what made you switch from the private to the public sector?

I found the job as clinical academic through a job ad from the hospital. Helping patients has always been a motivation of mine. Even before applying for the position at QIAGEN, I was keen on roles like my current one or working as a bioinformatician in the public sector. While at QIAGEN, working on cancer pipelines increased my interest in cancer-related work further.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

I have worked at QIAGEN in 5,5 years, first as Senior Bioinformatician and afterwards as Software Product Owner. I had the responsibility for software for different kinds of NGS analysis including analysis of cancer panel. I had to meet customers' wishes and estimate whether we could make a solution for them and to which cost.

However, though I liked the job and the responsibility, I got bored with making pipelines based on cell lines and reference samples. I wanted to be more directly involved in making a difference for patients, so I went ahead and applied for the clinical academic position. I learned a lot about software development, cancer panels and bioinformatics during my job at QIAGEN. And in fact, I have now implemented some of the software as clinical academic on the hospital. This means that I, in my new job, can apply my skills from QIAGEN directly and teach my colleagues in the pipeline. On the other hand, I have a lot to learn about all the other methods we use in the department.

Describe some of your typical tasks at your job?

In general, all my competencies come into play. The main priority of my job is analysis of patient samples. This involves looking at different data from various molecular analysis methods using different software and working out an interpretation to include in the pathology report. Besides that I am the IT coordinator in the department, I work with implementing new methods and software, and I write documentation for accreditation of our analyses. We work as a group and do a lot of sparring with each other.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

First of all, flexibility. The days at work vary, and the plans often change during the day. I also use my data analysis and data interpretation

skills. From my PhD, I am used to looking at the same kind of data as I work with now. I am used to considering if the data looks normal or if there is something odd about it. In relation to this, I also use my skills in troubleshooting, which I obtained during my PhD studies. Finally, I really benefit from my IT skills. I learned a lot from my previous job at QIAGEN, but also during my studies and PhD.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

In my PhD, I did not learn much about software development and sales, which turned out to be a big part of my job at QIAGEN. Here, I also learned the importance of documenting my work in a different way, considering the responsibility we had towards customers, unlike the more research-oriented documentation during my PhD. These skills have proven highly valuable in my current position as a clinical academic. I also really benefit from my network at QIAGEN in my current job, which is very handy, as we are using their software.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Connecting with people from diverse backgrounds and positions is important in many non-academic jobs. It helps to understand each other's qualifications. Get out and meet people with different backgrounds/positions than you!

Didde Boisen Andersen, Researcher at VIVE

By Camilla Rahr Tatari



What kind of position do you have today?

Didde works as a researcher at The Danish Center for Social Science Research (VIVE). With specialization in bioethics and political theory, her work revolves around ethical and moral issues related to disease prevention, medicine and health behaviour. Methodically, she works with various research methods, including surveys, qualitative interviews and statistical and theoretical analysis.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Didde's path was driven by a deep interest in the health section, practical-oriented research and the interest of interdisciplinary methods. This passion led her to pursue a master's in public health and later a PhD in political science at Aarhus University (AU). The synergy between her master and PhD provided an ideal blend of theoretical research and practice-oriented approaches. However, during her PhD, she felt a longing for the more hands-on, practical research approach and a curiosity of what the world had to offer on the other side of AU's yellow brick campus.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

After completing her PhD thesis, Didde worked as a research assistant at the Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination (CEPDISC),

while seeking funding for a postdoc position. Simultaneously, she kept an eye on VIVE, had a cup of coffee with the Head of the Analysis Department to explore how her expertise and profile could benefit VIVE. She started on her postdoc position, but when a job opening arose at VIVE that aligned with her skills and profile, she applied and got the job as a senior research analyst. Later on, she transitioned to her current job within the company to their research track.

How did you find your first job/current job?

A meeting with AU's career guidance encouraged deeper reflection on her circumstances and potential opportunities. Afterwards she engaged her network, enjoyed conversations over coffee, and continued her reflections about her values and potential opportunities.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Activating her network, Didde reached out to the Head of the Analysis Department at VIVE. They met for a cup of coffee discussing her profile's relevance to VIVE. After their meeting, the communication persisted through emails.

Describe a typical day/week?

In her position at VIVE, Didde's typical day revolves around project coordination meetings, data analysis, report and article writing,

Education

2021: PhD in Political Science, Aarhus University

2017: MSc in Public Health, Aarhus University

2014: BA in Public Health, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Researcher, VIVE

2022- 2023: Senior Research Analyst, VIVE

2022: Postdoc, AU/Data Manager, AU

2021-2022: Research Assistant, CEPDISC, AU

and staying updated with theoretical research (meaning reading a couple of hours each day). Her schedule allows for flexibility, including the option to occasionally work from home.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

From her PhD studies, Didde has developed significant benefits, primarily in her analytical expertise, skilled methodology knowledge, strong writing skills, ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge, effective project management skills, and time management expertise.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Didde felt a need for improved funding skills (her PhD was fully funded) and a deeper understanding of the economic aspects of project management, particularly budgeting. Additionally, improving her knowledge of communication strategies for broader audiences to get the research out in public and on the agenda for public debate. Luckily, VIVE offers a range of intern courses and fosters a culture of peer-to-peer training, providing invaluable opportunities for ongoing skill development.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Looking back, Didde would not change anything about her focus and dedication on her PhD project. However, given extra hours, she would have spent them on more communication strategies and practice-oriented approaches.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Early on! Didde has always thought about what her next career step should be. However, her proactive engagement with networking and seeking career guidance began around six to eight months before submitting her PhD thesis.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Engage with your network and be curious about the opportunities. However, begin by reflecting on your own situation, values, and goals for your next job. Be brave — have coffee meetings – not only with the 'right' people but also with those who may seem 'wrong'. Their perspectives might clarify your own path, contributing with insights even in job opportunities that seem uninteresting.

Lene Bastrup Jørgensen, Head of Research at Viborg Regional Hospital

By Susanne Lillelund Sørensen



Education

2011: PhD in Health Science, Aarhus University

2007: MSc in Nurse Science, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023-present: Head of Research at Department of Neurology (Viborg)

2016-present: Associated Professor, AU

2020-2023: Chief Knowledge Officer (HE Midt)

2018-2020: Senior Consultant at Cairos Consultant A/S

2016-2018: Director of Research (HE Midt)

2012-2016: Head of Interdisciplinary Research Unit (Silkeborg)

What kind of position do you have today?

I am Head of Research at the Department of Neurology at Viborg Regional Hospital. My primary task is to build up the structures and the organization for a new interdisciplinary research environment. Furthermore, I hold a part-time position as an associated professor at Aarhus University.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Yes, I have had three previous employments in different research units at Regional Hospital Central Jutland. My primary task has been to develop and build up organizations for fruitful interdisciplinary research environments. Furthermore, I have been in charge of constructing a Knowledge Centre for Neurorehabilitation. It tastes of research, but in these jobs, I have primarily used my skills to organize, structure, get stakeholders to collaborate effectively and unfolding the project portfolio instead of fully prioritizing the research myself as an associated professor at the Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus University. Besides the positions I have held in the public sector and at the university, I have also worked as senior consultant in a private consulting house working with organizational development and leadership. The sales aspect of that job was completely new to me, and I found the mercantile aspect very difficult.

I struggled a lot until a person said to me: "Try to think of it as You have something to offer, and that someone can benefit from that". The variety of task I handled in that position was very interesting from coaching to conflict handling and facilitating work environment in the healthcare sector, private sector, and municipalities.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Chance and network have played a great part in forming my academic career. After completing my PhD, I had the desire to work closer to clinical practice. Therefore, it felt natural for me to return to my hospital department and the clinical practice that I knew. Afterwards, I have been driven by the task of translating knowledge from research to clinical practice and making sure that new knowledge is applied in clinical practice.

How did you find your first job/current job?

My first job was as Head of nurse research at the Centre of Elective Surgery, Silkeborg Regional Hospital, where I did my PhD. Early in my PhD, my department expressed an interest in assigning me to a position when I completed my PhD. We had continuous discussions about possible employment.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/ university before you started? I had worked as a nurse in the department for many years.

Furthermore, the department partially financed my PhD.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

To succeed in building up a research organization, as I have done, you must know research. Doing a PhD in health science helped me to gain insight into research and necessary conditions for supportive research leadership. During my PhD, I acquired essential skills such as working independently in a structured and systematic manner.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

I have always had an interest in behavioural theory and organizational theory, and I have studied these fields on my own. I have also completed a coaching education. After my PhD, I realised that I had a talent for organizing and facilitating stakeholders to interact and cooperate, and for analysing possible strategies and discovering which is the most efficient strategy to follow. These skills come naturally

to me and are something that I have developed over the years.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Nothing really. I acquired many useful basic skills during my PhD. I am the type of person who enjoys exploring and testing new ways of doing things. I appreciate not being restricted by borders when I work. I like defining the frame myself but also to develop the frame and project in cooperation with others.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Be aware of what facilitates energy in your work life and follow that energy. Previously, I would have advised you to follow your passion, but I have found that this advice may in some persons lead to experiencing burnout. So, my advice is for you to explore what fills you with energy and try to formulate what you dream of accomplishing. When you have explored that, don't expect to fulfil your dream in your position post-PhD. Instead, be aware of and try out potential step-stones which you think will bring you closer to your dream.

Niels Holm Jensen, Innovation consultant at Center for Innovation Aarhus

By Anne-Mette Iversen



Education

2012: PhD in Psychology, Aarhus University
2010: MSc in Psychology, Aarhus University

Jobs

2022- : Innovation consultant. Center for Innovation Aarhus
2021-2022: Post Doc at Aarhus University, Psychology (environmental psychology)
2020- : Partner and consultant at "Vanebrudspalæet" (consulting and workshops)
2018-2020: Management consultant at BRO-communication
2017-2018: Research assistant, Aarhus University, Psychology
2013-2016: Adjunct at Aarhus University, Psychology

What kind of position do you have today?

Niels works as a project partner. He supports innovation projects from the municipality of Aarhus. He supports data collection (e.g., conducting interviews), facilitating workshops, teaching courses in methods/innovation, test prototypes, desk research, and literature search.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

After the PhD, Niels stayed in academia for five years. He worked closely together with his PhD main supervisor. He would have liked to become an associate professor. However, he did not receive funding and had to leave academia. He applied for a position in a consulting agency to have more colleagues/a team. Furthermore, he wanted to try to work on shorter projects in a private company. He got a job in a consultancy company with a great social environment and an inspiring team. He loved working there. However, the job position was in Copenhagen, and after a couple of years, he missed working closer to his home in Aarhus. As a result, he applied for a position as a postdoc at Aarhus University (sustainability/environmental psychology).

and went back to Aarhus and academia.

How did you find your first job/current job?

His main supervisor helped him apply for funding while he was a PhD student. Therefore, he had the opportunity to continue his research after the end of his PhD.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Before the employment in the private sector, he did not have any contacts. He tried to make coffee appointments with employees at the companies he was interested in. That was how he got the job as a consultant in Copenhagen.

Describe a typical day/week.

A typical week for Niels consists of teaching preparation, meetings (with project partners), workshop (and workshop planning), data collection, teaching, and project management.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Teaching competencies, analytical approaches to projects, experience with different methods, understanding of the complexity of projects, argumentation/evidence.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD, which you have developed afterward?

Social skills and collaboration skills. As a PhD student, he learned to do everything himself. Today, he has learned to work more in teams. He has also developed method skills. As a PhD student, he primarily learned quantitative methods. Today, he also uses qualitative methods.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

He would have thought more about the usefulness of the subject (what I could use it for after the PhD), have worked harder to create a network of people/experts to collaborate with after his PhD, and have used social media more

to create a social network and to tell people about the work he was doing.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

At the end of his PhD, he talked to his supervisor about the possibility of staying in academia. They applied for funding so he could stay in academia immediately after he finished his PhD.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Network! Use social media to communicate your work. Don't be too humble about your work.

Lei Cheng, Facility Manager at cellX

By Asta Mannstaedt Rasmussen



What kind of position do you have today?

Facility manager of cellX, situated at Aarhus University (AU).

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

At her previous job, the focus was more on technical expertise and working with a specific set of methods, helping others produce data within the field of proteomics, and it mainly entailed performing the same type of daily tasks. Changing positions thus provided an opportunity to try new things with less repetitive work, and learn more about adjacent research fields, methods, and management. Her current position isn't just focused on proteomics and a limited set of methods, but relates to all branches of omics analysis.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Her previous job was also at Aarhus University in an academical, technical and administrative position (AC-TAP), which provided more stability. However, the move to her current position was due to exploring job opportunities providing more challenging and variable tasks.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Lei started in a Post Doc. position at Aarhus University right after finishing her PhD at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU).

She looked at positions around Europe, both academic and non-academic, before applying for the position at AU. Subsequently, the professor with the available Pots Doc. position contacted her PhD supervisor for a recommendation, after which she got the job. Beforehand, she also went to multiple job interviews, including some abroad, and always went in person as it is the best way to figure out if potential colleagues are someone whom you can work well with.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/ university before you started?

For her first job, she didn't have any contacts before receiving the Post Doc. position. However, in her current position, she is still working together with her colleagues from the previous job as an AC-TAP. There is thus a big overlap in the working environment between her last and current position.

Describe a typical day/week?

Since the facility manager of cellX is a newly created position, Lei has been in charge of defining the position and her responsibilities. No day is the same, however, with tasks that need to be done during the week. A day can involve (a lot of) meetings, emails, organizing projects and events, visiting different departments during the week, and interacting with company staff (e.g., suppliers of laboratory equipment). She still does some lab work and stays up to date on current literature.

Education

2008-2011: PhD in Biochemistry, University of Southern Denmark (SDU)

2004-2006: MSc in Biotechnology, SDU

Jobs

2022 - present: CellX facility manager

2021 - 2022: AC-TAP (Academical - Technical/Administrative staff), Aarhus University (AU)

2016 - 2020: Assistant professor, AU

2012 - 2016: Post Doc., AU

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today? Particularly, her technical skills and her experience with specific experimental methods are a huge benefit for her current job and collaborations. In general, she thinks that her PhD provided in-depth scientific understanding and experience conducting research projects, which have been very beneficial.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

During her PhD, she was very reliant on her PI and his connections when establishing collaborations, with most collaboration being done within the research group. Thus, professional communication skills and networking were something she needed to develop afterwards. In addition, she gained more management and coordination responsibility after her PhD in relation to new projects and collaborators, as she no longer were reliant on a PI.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

While it is a hard question to answer, 'what if', she would have considered putting more time into her PhD to get a larger scientific output. During her PhD, Lei didn't spend too much time considering future career possibilities. Like many people in academia, she assumed that doing a Post Doc was the natural next step

after the PhD. To do something differently, she might have considered starting a bit earlier thinking of next career steps and maybe applied for some funding.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

As she found the Post Doc position to be the next natural step when being in academia, Lei didn't spend considerable time planning her career beforehand. It was first as an assistant professor with shorter (1-2 year) contracts that she started thinking a bit more about her career path and job stability – also in relation to her family. Now, she is currently on a longer five-year contract and hasn't started planning her career steps after. Lei finds it important to be in a position that is motivating, challenging and not too repetitive and static. She expects to gain many new skills from her current position, which will influence her next job and what opportunities present themselves.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Do not stress too much about the future and having everything planned beforehand. Instead, it is nice to have a vision of what you find interesting, so that it is possible to grab opportunities when they present themselves. Also, networking is important. Knowing people provides opportunities for collaboration, jobs, and recommendations (both for you, but also for insights into potential jobs that you may be interested in).

Mahboobeh Amoushahi, Senior researcher at Rigshospitalet

By Julie Feld Madsen



Education

2016: PhD in Anatomical Sciences, Tarbiat Modares University

2012: MSc in Anatomical Sciences, Tarbiat Modares University

Jobs

2023-present: Senior Researcher, Rigshospitalet

2021-2023: Assistant Professor, Aarhus University

2017-2021: Postdoc, Aarhus University

What kind of position do you have today?

Senior researcher.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Mahboobeh is passionate about science, with a primary interest in laboratory research to advance scientific knowledge. As a senior researcher, she enjoys applying her problem-solving skills to contribute to various projects, finding it the most exciting aspect of research. Through her involvement, she aims to assist others in advancing their projects and making meaningful impact in the research field.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes – which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Mahboobeh has four years as a postdoc and two years as an assistant professor at Aarhus University. These jobs honed her troubleshooting skills and taught her to master multitasking. As an assistant professor, she not only led independent research projects (leading to peer-reviewed publications) but also provided guidance to students, fostering their success and contributing to advancements in the research field. It is all competences that she uses in the new job.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Mahboobeh discovered the postdoc opportunity by applying through the Aarhus University website, where she came across the project advertisement.

Subsequently, she found her current position on Jobindex.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Mahboobeh initially submitted her CV, cover letter, and PhD diploma to her current workplace. Following this, she participated in an online interview where she presented her work. Finally, she underwent a physical interview before commencing the job.

Describe a typical day/week?

Mahboobeh's schedule revolves around project management. A portion of her day is dedicated to conducting experiments in the lab for various projects. The remaining time is spent researching and reading articles to stay updated on methods and protocols, addressing challenges encountered in the projects.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Mahboobeh highlights problem-solving as a crucial skill, developed through overcoming challenges in project setup. This experience fostered independence and troubleshooting abilities. Additionally, her assistance to others cultivated effective multitasking, a valuable asset in her current role.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Mahboobeh learned

how to write grant applications and, during her four years as a postdoc, developed a strong determination to keep going in her research career despite facing rejections.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

She wishes to study and conduct more research in tissue engineering, aligning with her current career focus in this field.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Immediately after completing her PhD, she started thinking about continuing her research career as she has always been passionate about science.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Mahboobeh's key advice is simple: "Don't give up". She finds that the most interesting aspect of research is devising ways to enhance methods and overcome challenges. Another piece of advice from her is to identify the specific research field that truly captivates your interest.

Louise Bruun Thingholm, Clinical Bioinformatician at Dept. of Molecular Medicine (MOMA), AUH



By Gustav Alexander Poulsgaard

What kind of position do you have today?

Louise is a clinical Bioinformatician at the Department of Molecular Medicine (MOMA), Aarhus University Hospital. She is also co-founder and CEO of Biomcare, Aarhus.

Louise connected with local contacts in the core facilities seeking assistance with bioinformatic analysis. There was a shortage of persons with her bioinformatic expertise, so she played a fundamental role in addressing this gap as a post.doc.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Louise always seized the opportunities that allowed her to follow her interests in the intersection of informatics and human health.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

While at the end of her PhD at the Institute of Clinical Molecular Biology (IKMB), Kiel University, Germany, Louise started her own company in Denmark, Biomcare. After completing her PhD, Louise moved back to Denmark to head her own company while also working remotely as postdoctoral researcher at IKMB. Through her research and work with Biomcare, Louise built a large network. It was through this network that she discovered the opportunity to become a Clinical Bioinformatician at MOMA.

How did you find your first job/current job?

At the institute of her PhD studies,

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Louise actively reached out to her network to connect with people possessing facilities suitable for her research ambitions in the human microbiome. Here, Ole Halfdan Larsen, head of department at MOMA, was an important connection for providing a position suitable for Louise. Ole was part of Louise's large network, which she had built through Biomcare.

Describe a typical day/week?

As a Clinical Bioinformatician at MOMA, Louise dedicates half of her time to drive the development of a microbiome core facility. The remaining half of her time, she focuses on setting up a human microbiome research group. This involves tasks such as establishing clinical collaborations and initiating sample collections and applying for funding. As the CEO of Biomcare, Louise handles a lot of administrative work and customer contact, while she has delegated the bioinformatic work to her employees.

Education

2014-2018: PhD in Bioinformatics, Kiel University

2011-2013: MSc in Molecular Medicine, AU

2008-2011: BSc in Molecular Medicine, AU

Jobs

2023- present: Clinical Bioinformatician at Dept. of Molecular Medicine, AUH

2017-present: Co-founder and CEO of BiomCare

2019-2023: Postdoc at Kiel University

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

During her PhD studies, Louise acquired competencies within bioinformatics and microbiome analysis. These skills were defining in establishing Biomcare and continue to be relevant in her role as a Clinical Bioinformatician at MOMA. Louise also benefits from her experiences with project management in an interdisciplinary field for informatics and clinical research. During her Master's and PhD studies, she learned to effectively communicate with medical doctors, molecular biologists, and software developers. She uses that experience to connect people and ideas, setting up new bioinformatic research activities of the human microbiome.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

After her PhD, Louise developed skills in business, including communication with business professionals, advertising, and sales. Additionally, she learned to be critical of advice and understand the importance of relying on her expertise and situation rather than meticulously following guidance. Many people will offer opinions on how you should establish your business, what steps to take and guidelines to follow to have a successful business or research project. However, most people don't know you, your situation, or the problem you're facing. You're the expert, so be sure to listen to yourself instead of blindly following advice.

What would you have done differently during your PhD (if anything) considering your current career?

Louise emphasized how easy it is to second-guess one's own choices, but, in general, she wouldn't change anything. However, one thing she may have benefitted from, would be to focus more on the red thread of the project rather than accepting many unrelated tasks from her supervisor and peers.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

During the last year of her PhD, Louise knew she wanted to start a company exploiting the competencies and experience she had gained through her PhD. However, she was concerned that the start-up would not generate enough income to commit to it full-time. Therefore, the company became a spare time occupation besides writing up her PhD dissertation and working remotely as a postdoc.

How did you become involved in starting your own company?

Starting her own company was something Louise had dreamt about for many years. It wasn't until her PhD research exchange in Boston, where she got inspired by their microbiome analyses, that she decided to go for it.

Were there any surprises in connection with starting your own business? What surprised you the most?

Louise was particularly surprised by the difficulty of securing funding for a start-up in Denmark. Despite the widespread notion that funds are allocated to support start-ups, gaining access to such funding proved incredibly challenging.

How was the balance between work and personal time in your startup?

Being a postdoc and CEO on the side demands a significant number of hours. People in neighboring offices even speculated that she was hiding a bed in her office because she was always there when they arrived and still there when they left.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

The advice would be to embrace a creative approach to actively pursue opportunities and reach out to people who might provide such opportunities. While it's common to send an email, making phone calls will leave an impression. A phone call could even just be a kind reminder to answer an email. Follow your interests and do the possible.



Inger Mechlenburg, Professor and Head of Research in Orthopaedic Rehabilitation and Exercise Interventions at AU and AUH

By Lærke Krarup

Education

2016: DMSc, Aarhus University
2007: PhD in Medicine, Aarhus University
2002: MSc in Health Science, Aarhus University
1999: BSc in Physiotherapy, VIA University College

Jobs

2017- present: Professor in Orthopedic Rehabilitation at AUH and AU
2011-2017: Associate professor, Department of Public Health, AU
2010-2017: Associate professor, Department of Clinical Medicine, AU
2010-2017: Senior Researcher, Aarhus Hospital
2009-2011: External ass professor, AU
2007-2010: Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Clinical Research, AU

What kind of position do you have today?

Inger works as a professor and as the leader of her own research group.

Why did you decide to go in the direction you chose?

Inger has wanted to work in research ever since her master's degree.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job – if yes, which? And how did they lead to your current job?

Inger has taken the beaten path as a PhD student, then postdoc and associate professor. Six years ago, she was employed as a professor in Orthopedic Rehabilitation.

How did you find your first job/current job?

The job was created for Inger by building up her own research group while teaching at Aarhus University, publishing papers, and fundraising for research.

What contacts – if any – did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started?

Inger's most important contact was her main supervisor on her master thesis, reading chair professor Kjeld Søballe.

Kjeld Søballe also became the main supervisor on her PhD project.

Describe a typical day/week?

On a typical day, Inger arrives early at the hospital and starts reading and answering emails. Later in the morning, she typically has meetings with PhD students or collaborators about research projects. She tests patients herself in some of the research projects, so she has first-hand knowledge of the methods she uses. This typically takes place after lunch. Some days, she teaches or supervises students on the Master's degree in Health Sciences or Sports Science. In the late afternoon, she often reads and comments on the students' manuscripts. Inger tries to be first author on one article per year.

What skills and experiences from your PhD studies do you have the most benefit of today?

Learning to take responsibility for her studies and act as a project manager, training the skills of writing scientific articles, going to conferences and learning how to network with other researchers from abroad, and learning how to fundraise.

What skills would you say you didn't develop during your PhD which you have developed afterwards?

Inger highlights the importance of working with many partners and sometimes foreign partners in multicenter clinical trials as a skill, which she didn't develop during her PhD, but first developed afterwards.

How early did you start thinking about your next career step after the PhD?

Inger was already thinking about this during her PhD. She applied for and received funding from

the Danish Council for Independent Research to pursue a postdoc position.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies?

Inger's career advice for someone who is just about to finish his/her PhD studies is to consider whether she/he wants to take the research route in academia, work primarily clinically, work in a private company or work in management. She advises to consider what types of tasks you enjoy the most.