

WHAT DO PHD'S FROM HEALTH SCIENCES DO?

Career Portraits 2025



INTRODUCTION

This is a collection of career portraits of former PhD students from the health sciences at Aarhus University. Some of the big questions for PhD students are often “what do PhDs actually do?” as well as “How do they find work and what are their job positions?” This collection of career portraits seeks to answer that question 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 2025. The focus of the course is careers outside of academia, so the majority of the portraits are of PhDs working in the industry.

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

From the course organizers:

Vibeke Broe (AU Career PhD & JR), HEALTH Graduate school, Aarhus University 2025.

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PhD's working in the private sector

Lars Jørgensen

Principal Scientist in Peptide Research,
Novo Nordisk

By Amalie Lykke Olsen



Education

2011: PhD in Medicinal Chemistry, University of Copenhagen

2005: MSc in Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Copenhagen

Jobs

2025- present: Principal Scientist, Peptide Research, Novo Nordisk

2022-2025: Specialist, Research Chemistry, Novo Nordisk

2019-2022: Senior Scientist, Regenerative Medicine, LEO Pharma

2019: Senior Scientist, Medicinal Chemistry, LEO Pharma

2014-2019: Research Scientist, Medicinal Chemistry, LEO Pharma

2011-2013: Postdoctoral Researcher, The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, CA, USA

2008-2011: PhD student, University of Copenhagen

2009-2010: External graduate student, The Scripps Research Institute, La Jolla, CA, USA

2007-2007: Chemist, MedChem ApS,

2005-2007: Research assistant, Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of Copenhagen

What kind of position do you have today?

Lars is employed as a Principal Scientist in Peptide Research at Novo Nordisk. In this role, he serves as the Technical Project Manager for one of the company's research projects.

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

Since elementary school, Lars has had a long-standing interest in the natural sciences, and during high school he developed a particular interest in chemistry. This later led him to pursue a master's degree in Pharmaceutical Sciences and subsequently a PhD in Medicinal Chemistry, both in Copenhagen.

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

Lars has held several positions within his field before his current role. He has been a Research Assistant at a university, a Chemist at a small company called MedChem ApS, which carried out contract

work for larger pharmaceutical firms, a Postdoctoral Researcher at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, California, and, lastly, a Medicinal Chemist (Research Scientist and later Senior Scientist) at LEO Pharma in Ballerup

How did you find your first job/current job?

The trajectory of Lars' career has often been shaped by professional connections. For his first position, Lars remained at the university where he had completed his master's degree, taking on a role as a Research Assistant. During his PhD, he spent six months at The Scripps Research Institute, and it was at this institution that he later returned for his Postdoctoral position. During this period, he worked on a project in collaboration with LEO Pharma. When he decided to move back to Denmark, LEO Pharma offered him a position as a Medicinal Chemist, where he remained for eight years until the company ceased its internal research activities. Subsequently, Novo Nordisk had an opening for an engaging

position in Research Chemistry, for which he applied and was offered the role.

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

He had no contacts at Novo Nordisk when he applied for his current position.

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

Lars emphasises that during his PhD, he was part of an excellent group of fellow students eager to share and discuss scientific ideas. The most valuable lesson he takes from this period is the importance of collaboration and knowledge sharing. He notes that teamwork is one of the key factors for success in his current role. Additionally, a PhD allows you to explore a topic in depth over an extended period, teaching persistence and dedication. All qualities he still finds essential today.

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

The skills that Lars did not develop during his PhD and had to acquire subsequently included a broader understanding of drug discovery and its complexity, as well as advanced stakeholder management. Drug discovery projects in industry settings are considerably more complex than PhD projects. In addition, navigating the complexities of large organisations is not something you necessarily experiences during a PhD; this understanding develops with time and experience. Lars emphasises that a PhD represents only the beginning of a continuous learning journey.

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

Reflecting back, Lars states that he does not believe he would have done much differently. During his PhD, he acquired many technical skills, all of which have provided a solid foundation for his career. He emphasises that it is impossible to anticipate all future skill requirements and believes that any skills you might lack will be learned upon entering the workforce.

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

Lars had such a rewarding experience at The Scripps Research Institute in California during his stay abroad that he knew from that moment he wished to return for a Postdoctoral position after completing his PhD. This occurred approximately two years into his PhD studies.

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

“Go abroad!” Lars states. He considers spending time at another university in a different country (such as undertaking a Postdoctoral position in California) to be an exceptional opportunity for both professional and personal development.

Kristine Bissenbakker

Consultant, Omnia Clinic

By Asli Sena Kücükıldız



Education

2023: PhD, Center for General Practice, Department of Public Health, University of Copenhagen

2015: MD, University of Copenhagen
Certified Functional Medicine Practitioner, Institute for Functional Medicine

Jobs

2025-present: Self-employed at Lua Health

2023-present: Online education in Functional Medicine whilst working as a Health Practitioner at the Functional Medicine Clinic, Omnia Clinic

2018-2023: PhD student and post.doc at Center for General Practice, Department of Public Health, University of Copenhagen

2016-2018: Senior registrar (Introlæge) in general practice

2015-2016: KBU-resident at Køge Hospital Emergency Department

What kind of position do you have today?

I am currently working part-time as a consultant at Omnia Clinic. Meanwhile I am building a company with two business partners, Lua Health, where we are creating holistic and preventive programmes for women. We work with the whole picture: nutrition, physical activity, sleep, stress levels, work life, trauma and mental health.

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

The way I want to work as a doctor is simply not possible in the public healthcare system. In general practice, you normally have around 15 minutes for each consultation. Now I spend 1.5-2 hours on an initial consultation. I love taking the tempo out of the doctor's visit. I am not drawn to emergency care — it's good that others are; we need them — but I need time.

Many of my consultations are very personal and emotional, and time is essential. Patients are trained to seek their GP with one issue, but the real problem behind e.g.

migraines might be a relationship in crisis — something I cannot meaningfully address in a quarter of an hour.

What are your thoughts on providing care outside the publicly funded system?

I struggle with the fact that I have to take money for this type of work — who do you actually get to help in this setup? But if I want to work differently, this is where I have to start, and perhaps one day, I can help change the agenda.

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

I did my PhD at the University of Copenhagen in the Research Unit for General Practice, focusing on multimorbidity and its impact on quality of life. I have always imagined becoming a GP, and the desire to immerse myself in a meaningful topic related to general practice was one reason I pursued a PhD. After medical school, I completed KBU and an internship in general

practice. I defended my PhD three years ago, did a six-month postdoc, and have been at Omnia Clinic since then.

How did you discover your interest in functional medicine?

My PhD was mixed-method and working with my qualitative data, I was deeply affected by how many people felt unseen, unheard and powerless in contact with the health care system. It motivated me to work in a way where people feel seen and heard — and empowered to do something themselves for their health. I realised I lacked tools for this within traditional medical training. At the same time, after two pregnancies, my own body “acted strangely”, and I didn’t feel well. I saw Pia Norup at Omnia Clinic without knowing anything about functional medicine. Through that experience I discovered how I could use my lifestyle to get in balance — and these later became the tools I use with my own clients.

Describe a typical day/week.

Right now, my weeks vary a lot. I see clients two to three times a week. The rest of the time is for administration, deep work, and having enough time to thoroughly review tests. This is also the structure I aim for long-term.

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

I learned that I enjoy the opportunity to immerse myself in a topic. I also rely heavily on the critical thinking I developed during my PhD — especially the ability to wonder, stay curious, and read studies critically.

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

I think the steps I took were the right ones for me at the time. But if I were a PhD student now — with older children and the experience I have gained today — I would have looked beyond my own project. You become very “married to your project”, and I didn’t have the capacity to network or explore other exciting projects that could have complemented mine.

What did you find most challenging about transitioning out of academia?

One of the hardest things coming from academia was the feeling, that every sentence I said had to be backed by evidence, which can feel limiting. Whilst working as a PhD you can hide behind your project, but now, being self-employed, I’m in front line of my work, which is both exciting and scary.

How have your thoughts been regarding not entering specialist training (HU)?

This has been difficult. As a doctor, it feels almost unquestioned that specialist training is the natural path. I am still uncertain, but I don’t think I will do a HU. After completing the functional medicine training, I feel as if I have “put on a pair of glasses” that would make it hard for me to be the kind of doctor expected within the current guidelines. In the beginning, I even wondered whether I was allowed to skip specialist training. But after speaking to people outside medicine and academia, I realised that we as doctors can do a great many things — you just have to think creatively.

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

I have benefited a lot from daring to reach out and use the inspiring people around you as mentors. If you see someone doing something you find exciting, people usually respond positively when you tell them, you find their work inspiring. I also think it is important to be brave. If you have a PhD, you will get a job. Dare to play with your career; this has given me a lot of joy — experimenting with what I can do. It is also helpful to make a list of what you want your work life to give you. That is how I realised that flexibility — at this stage of my life — is essential. It matters deeply to me that I can influence who I work with, work creatively, set my own pace, and still have time for focused deep work. It is easy to jump on a train that isn't even yours — and suddenly you are far along the wrong track. Dare to explore what you think is meaningful.

Johanne Ahrenfeldt,

Data Scientist, Kamstrup

By Eva Ferlev Jensby



Education

2018: PhD in Bioinformatics, DTU

2014: MSc in Bioinformatics and Systems Biology, DTU

Jobs

2025 – present: Data Scientist at Kamstrup

2023 – 2025: Clinical bioinformatician, Department of Molecular Medicine (MOMA), Aarhus University Hospital

2019 – 2023: Postdoc in bioinformatics, MOMA, Aarhus University

2018 – 2019: Bioinformatic researcher, ALK

2018 – 2018: Research Assistant at Technical University of Denmark (DTU)

What kind of position do you have today?

Johanne currently works as a data scientist at Kamstrup, where her role focuses on improving and developing algorithms used to estimate potential leaks in water pipes and other useful tools for water utilities.

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

After approximately seven years in academia following her PhD, funding for the specific project ended in 2025. As a result, Johanne decided it was the right time to leave academia. A key motivation was the desire for a permanent position after around ten years of temporary contracts, offering stability and long-term security. At the same time, it was important for her to continue working in a role she considered meaningful, where her skills could contribute to work with important long-term implications. During her search, she focused on organisations working with large datasets and identified Kamstrup as a strong combination of a good working environment, societal relevance, and data-intensive work.

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

Johanne's previous positions include employment as a research assistant at DTU, a bioinformatics researcher at ALK, a postdoctoral position and later a clinical bioinformatician position at the Department of Molecular Medicine (MOMA) at Aarhus University Hospital. From her PhD, she gained basic programming skills, experience working on large computer clusters, critical thinking, statistical expertise, and the ability to complete projects. At ALK, she learned R through hands-on, side-by-side training and developed a broader understanding of how to function within a professional workplace. At MOMA, she further strengthened her R skills and gained further experience working with large-scale datasets. Across these roles, she developed a mindset of actively engaging with new challenges and trusting her ability to solve unfamiliar problems. These competencies are directly applicable in her current role as a data scientist.

How did you find your current job?

Johanne initially came across a job advertisement on LinkedIn and applied immediately, having heard positive things about Kamstrup. Although she was not offered that specific position, the company later contacted her directly when a new position became available.

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

Johanne did not have any prior contacts at Kamstrup before submitting her job application.

Describe a typical day/week.

Being a data scientist at Kamstrup involves extensive computer-based work, primarily focused on coding and data analysis. A typical week includes participation in a planning meeting where upcoming tasks are discussed. Johanne also responds to direct customer enquiries and collaborates closely with water utilities, for example, by investigating why a potential leak was not flagged by the system. In addition, she frequently prepares presentations for both colleagues and customers.

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

Her PhD provided strong skills in programming and statistics, as well as the ability to complete projects. This includes developing a sense of knowing when something is good enough.

What skills would you say you did not develop during your PhD, which you have developed afterwards?

Johanne highlights that her scientific writing skills improved substantially during her subsequent employment. In addition, she also

became much more effective at presenting complex research in a clear and easy-to-understand manner.

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

In retrospect, she would have liked to take more advanced courses in statistics. Otherwise, her PhD and subsequent career steps have collectively made her very qualified for her current position.

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

Already during her PhD, Johanne knew that she did not want to stay at DTU, as she had completed both her Bachelor's and Master's there as well. She began active job searching during the final six months of her PhD.

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

Ensure strong proficiency in coding and statistics and build enough confidence in data science to pursue roles in this field, if this is the direction you want to take.

Words of Wisdom

Do not give up during the job application process. Job advertisements often list extensive requirements. Do not get scared. You are more qualified and competent than you realise.



Anonymous,

Application Specialist at a pharmaceutical company

By Giorgia Marino

What kind of position do you have today?

Currently, I work as an Application Specialist at a large pharmaceutical company, where I manage a portfolio of products and support their full lifecycle—from implementation and user support to ongoing optimization and updates.

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

I have always wanted a role with greater customer interaction—one in which I am no longer working in the laboratory but instead use my technical expertise to support others and contribute to their projects. Although I did not secure my dream job immediately, I ultimately found the right path.

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

It was challenging to secure my first position after completing my PhD, and I needed a stable salary to support my family, so I decided to pursue a postdoctoral role. After one year, I obtained a Scientist position at a small company in Spain. I then moved back to

Sweden, as my husband is Swedish and I found a job there that suited me well.

How did you find your first job/current job?

I secured my postdoctoral position by applying to an open vacancy advertised on the university website. Similarly, I obtained my first industry role through a standard application process. In contrast, I was hired for my current position through internal networking within the company.

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

I didn't have any connections with the company before joining.

Describe a typical day/week?

My schedule is highly varied and includes periodic travel. I work from home frequently, and approximately twice per month, I travel to client sites or conferences. On a typical workday, I participate in meetings with both internal and external stakeholders, discuss products with prospective clients, and address issues as they arise.

Education

2019: PhD, Aarhus University

2015: MSc, Barcelona University

Jobs

2023: Application specialist, Sweden

2022: Field Market Manager, Sweden

2021: Scientist, small pharma company in Madrid

2020: Postdoc: Copenhagen University

Much of my work involves project and time management, which requires substantial internal coordination and communication.

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

One of the skills I use is project management but also presentation skills. I need to present to customers daily and use my technical skills to understand their needs and find suitable solutions.

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

The most challenging aspect was the commercial side. It was not initially easy to understand how the business operates. I had to shift from a research mindset — where success depends on following established protocols—to a more dynamic approach in which priorities are speed, responsiveness, and delivering solutions efficiently.

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

I would have started looking for a new job much earlier. In hindsight, I realized too late that I needed to plan my next step well in advance. I do not regret completing a postdoc; however, it was not the direction I ultimately wanted to pursue, and it was not my dream role.

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

I started thinking about my career only after I submitted my thesis, which it was too late since I needed to secure a salary for my family.

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

My advice is to be clear about your next career step and to think carefully about what you want to do after your PhD. If you want to pursue a scientific role, focus your applications on those positions; if you are interested in project management, target that path instead. It is important to have a well-defined goal, particularly for job interviews, where you will need to articulate your motivation for the specific role. Identify what genuinely motivates you—this often takes time and reflection—and begin this process early.



Lasse Hansen,

Senior Data Scientist, Trifork

By Manuel Thomassen

What kind of position do you hold today?

Lasse Hansen is currently working as a Senior Data Scientist at Trifork. In this role, he applies advanced data science and artificial intelligence techniques and knowledge to real-world problems in close collaboration with coworkers and clients. His responsibilities go beyond technical implementation and include problem definition, stakeholder communication, and translating complex concepts into actionable insights.

What is your educational background?

Lasse holds a Master's degree in Cognitive Science from Aarhus University, with a focus on data science. He completed his education through the Danish 4+4 program, which allowed him to transition early from his Master's studies into a PhD program. His academic background combines technical, clinical, and data-driven perspectives, which later became central to his research and professional profile.

What was the focus of your PhD at Aarhus University?

Lasse completed his PhD in an interdisciplinary environment at the Department of Clinical Medicine at Aarhus University, working at the intersection of clinical prediction and data science to apply machine learning to improve patient outcomes in psychiatry. His research mainly focused on the PSYCOP Project, developing predictive models from electronic health records to enhance patient care. He also published open-source software, including a state-of-the-art pretrained speech model for Danish and a Python package for extracting metrics from text. He also contributed to the Danish foundation models project. Lasse describes his PhD years as highly rewarding, especially due to the interdisciplinary collaborative culture.

Why did you decide to pursue a different career path after your PhD?

A primary motivation for Lasse was to work in a role he found meaningful.

Education

2024: PhD in 2024, Aarhus University

2022: MSc in Cognitive Science, Aarhus University

2019: BSc in Cognitive Science, Aarhus University

Jobs

2025-present: Senior Data Scientist, Trifork

For him, motivation is closely linked to purpose, both in terms of societal impact and intellectual challenge. He was not interested in roles focused solely on programming; rather, he sought a position that combined technical depth with broader responsibilities, user engagement, and strategic decision-making.

Have you had other jobs before your current role, and how did they influence your career?

Before joining Trifork, Lasse's professional experience was mainly within academia. He advanced from a student assistant to a PhD researcher within the same research unit. This continuity provided a strong academic foundation and visibility, which became relevant when transitioning to industry.

How did you find your first or current job?

Lasse started exploring job opportunities informally toward the end of his PhD. Instead of actively applying, he was semi-headhunted by Trifork, who approached him about a position. He initially declined, opting for a short break that included travel and hiking. After this break, he reconnected with Trifork to see if the opportunity was still available, which it was, leading to his employment.

What contacts did you have at the workplace before you started?

Lasse did not have formal contacts at Trifork before the initial contact. However, his visibility as a PhD researcher played an important role. He emphasizes that participating in conferences, giving talks, and engaging with industry during his PhD can be crucial, as academic publications alone often have limited reach outside academia.

Describe a typical day or week in your current role.

A typical workweek involves close collaboration with both clients and internal teams. Lasse works on defining project scope, discussing analytical approaches, and presenting to stakeholders, including senior decision-makers such as CEOs and legal advisors. His role requires balancing technical understanding with communication and strategic thinking.

What skills from your PhD do you benefit from today?

Many core PhD skills are directly transferable to Lasse's current role. These include structured problem-solving, maintaining an overview of complex projects, forming independent and well-founded opinions, and clearly communicating complex material. He also highlights the value of an academic mindset, especially the ability to critically assess evidence and explain technical concepts to non-expert audiences.

What would you have done differently during your PhD, considering your current career?

Lasse does not express major regrets about his PhD path. However, he emphasizes the importance of actively engaging with end users and stakeholders throughout the research process.

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

Lasse began considering his next career move during the final phase of his PhD. From the start, he knew he didn't want a role solely focused on programming and quickly realized there were many opportunities in and around Aarhus.

What career advice would you give to someone about to finish a PhD?

Lasse encourages PhD students to engage with the broader world actively during their studies. This includes attending conferences, speaking with the industry, delivering talks, and communicating their work broadly. He stresses that visibility matters and that many opportunities arise through informal conversations. Lastly, he recommends taking time for reflection after completing the PhD. For him, a short break was an opportunity he could take, which made sense at the time.



Ida Grønborg,

Co-Founder and CEO of Cacto Health

By Nanna Sutter Rolighed

What kind of position do you have today?

My current working titles and role are Co-Founder and CEO of Cacto Health. My business partner is more focused on the technical aspects and product development. My role include leadership in a startup, networking and relations, particularly with clinics, and being the face of Cacto.

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

Looking back, it is both a coincidence and a conscious choice. I have spent my time in academia working hard and creating results and papers that were published. I would reflect on the impact my work had. I realised I wanted to make an impact differently, and I sometimes also wished for another type and speed of workflow. I start reflecting on my profile, which may not necessarily be a specialist; I may be more of a generalist. The speed I experience now is a lot faster. Why wait with testing if you can test now and get feedback? It seems closer to the real world.

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

Biomedical design has been the leading star; I would have never come into this type of work and forming a business otherwise. My background and the work I did before were very different. The transition has taken years, because I come from being a specialist, and I am now a generalist. The most important thing I learned was that things do not have to be perfect. Just go out and get feedback; it makes changes and adjustments easier both emotionally and financially.

How did you find your first job/current job?

The unique thing about Biomedical design is that all ideas and solutions that the participants create during the program is owned by the participants. Which is unique compared to other university spin-outs. It makes fundraising easier and the feeling of ownership is stronger.

Education

2018: PhD in Human nutrition, National Food institute, Technical University of Denmark

2013: MSc in Human Nutrition, University of Copenhagen

2008: BSc in Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs

Present: CEO and Co-founder, Cacto Health

2021-2023: Nutrition Scientist, Arla Foods

2020 -2021: Biomedical Design Fellow

2018-2019: Postdoctoral Researcher, National Food institute, Technical University of Denmark

Describe a typical day/week.

We are currently 3 full-time employees and 1 part-time in Cacto Health, and we also have Interns at times. We usually start Mondays with a team meeting where we get an overview of the week or fully plan the week. Most weeks, we can have 2 days working from home. We use Miro as a tool to manage our plans. Weeks are very different, and days are rarely similar. We are both at the office, in the clinics, at events, at meetings and reaching out internationally. We work in phases and then we go back and forth, like a traditional design thinking approach. Product development, user interactions and creating collaboration with clinics have been overall themes in the first years, besides funding, which is ongoing. Now we are starting to go much more into the commercial area of our project. We have both short-term and long-term timelines and milestones that we follow.

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

It is not my PhD skills I think I use the most. However, of course, project management skills are transferable. Clinical and practical skills from trials I don't really use much today.

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

In my current job, I needed to de-learn many routines and skills. In innovation and start-up, things go faster. Testing faster and working from instincts and initial data is much more common. Less data can be sufficient for testing and feedback when time is limited. Finding a need, a profitable market fit, and a valuable need that is profitable. I had to get used to getting out there a lot faster. Just doing something is better than doing nothing.

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

For what I am doing now, maybe I did not need a PhD, or maybe I could have spent more time finding a place with more focus on innovation or searched more for an industrial PhD in collaboration with a company.

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

I did not know where I was going to end, but I was doubting whether I was at the right place. Because so few who do a PHD stay in academia. Luckily, everything fell into place, and I landed at the right place. I found Biomedical design by chance when I was looking at jobs. I was primarily looking for jobs within research, but my research area was not so well represented in Aarhus; we had moved from Sealand to Jutland with few connections here.

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

I would listen more to my gut feelings, instincts, and learned more about how I was motivated and what type of work I thrive in. I would have dug into my preference of working method, my career profile and personality testing, to find out more about how I apply my skills the best. This can be done by using one of the available personality tests. It can just be a small free test available online. Also using and expanding your network would be one of my recommendations.



Liane Dupont,

Venture Associate, Lundbeckfonden
Bio-Capital

By Nanna Sutter Rolighed

What kind of position do you have today?

I am a Venture Associate at Lundbeckfonden BioCapital. I work in the role of a venture capital investor, focusing on making investments in early-stage biotechnology companies to support the development of new medical treatments on behalf of the Lundbeck Foundation. We operate under an evergreen fund structure, which means we do not return capital to external investors. Instead, any returns generated from our investments are reinvested or paid back to the Lundbeck Foundation, where they can be used to support the foundation's charitable and strategic objectives. Unlike most venture capital funds, which are structured as private funds with multiple limited partners seeking financial returns, Lundbeckfonden BioCapital has a single limited partner: The Lundbeck Foundation. This structure allows us to take a long-term investment approach, aligned with the foundation's mission. We provide early-stage biotechnology companies with risk capital in return for equity to support development activities that they would not be able to finance independently.

This typically involves both late pre-clinical and clinical development, supporting the generation robust clinical proof-of-concept data. On the back of such positive data, the goal is for our companies to subsequently be acquired by larger pharmaceutical or biotechnology companies, thereby allowing us to profit from our investment through our ownership. Our fund focuses exclusively on investments in therapeutics, which allows me to remain closely connected to science while contributing from an investment perspective. Our role involves identifying and selecting the most promising companies and projects with the potential to become effective medical treatments. We carry out in-depth scientific and commercial due diligence before investing, and once an investment is made, we work closely with the company. This collaboration typically includes taking board positions, where we help guide strategic and developmental decisions. At any given time, we typically have around 20 companies in our portfolio, across multiple different therapeutic areas. Working at the intersection of science and finance within

Education

2020: PhD in Philosophy University of Cambridge

2016: Master of Research (MRes), University of Cambridge

2014: BSc in Molecular Biomedicine, University of Copenhagen / University College London

Jobs

2022- present: Venture Associate, Lundbeckfonden BioCapital

2021-2022: Postdoctoral researcher, King's College London

venture capital is a relatively unique opportunity. Our team consists of six investment professionals, all of whom hold PhDs and have prior experience working in scientific research. This background gives us a strong advantage in understanding biological mechanisms of action and assessing the scientific validity of therapeutic approaches. Personally, I was keen to work in an environment where I could continue to apply my scientific background.

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

For most of my life, I had been very focused on a clear and well-defined goal: to become a scientist, to complete a PhD, and ultimately to become a group leader. I never seriously questioned this trajectory. However, towards the end of my PhD, when I finally had my high-impact paper in hand, it did not feel the way I had expected. I began to question its broader meaning; what impact does this work truly have, and what difference does it make to the world? At that point, I realised that I wanted to work in a role with a more visible and tangible impact on real-world outcomes. I also recognised that I was less interested in becoming a narrow specialist and wanted to be more of a generalist. I remained uncertain for some time as my dream of becoming a leading scientist had been a core part of my identity for as long as I could remember. I therefore chose to explore this further by undertaking a postdoctoral position, which was also the traditional next step towards becoming a group leader. In parallel, I began to investigate alternative career paths. During this process, I took an online MIT course on the “Business of Biotechnology”, where I was introduced to venture capital for the first time. It immediately resonated with me and felt like an ideal

career path. Venture capital offered the opportunity to maintain a rigorous scientific perspective, remain detail-oriented, develop an understanding of the commercial side of biotechnology, and—most importantly—contribute to work that has a clear and meaningful impact. Supporting the development of new therapeutics was something I found deeply motivating. I could have pursued a similar way of working within a single biotechnology company; however, venture capital allows me to work across a portfolio of companies. This means continuously learning about diverse therapeutic areas and biological mechanisms, which I greatly enjoy. The next question was how to get there. Venture capital is a small and competitive field with relatively few entry points. I considered several possibilities, including founding a start-up, becoming a consultant, or joining a larger company. During this period of exploration, a role became available. I decided to apply, thinking I had nothing to lose—if I was unsuccessful, at least I would gain insight into what was required. To my delight – and to some extent surprise – I was offered the position. Many people in similar roles have gained experience outside academia first, making this opportunity particularly meaningful to me.

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

I had my postdoc at King’s College London, which was 2 years, and then I came straight to Lundbeckfonden BioCapital. Whilst the roles are in no way related, my postdoc allowed me to improve my project management and team working skills, something which I use extensively in my current role. I also had my first experience of clinical research, working with patient serum samples from the SARS-Cov-2 vaccine efforts.

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

I had no contacts or network in Denmark; I was still living in London and had ended up living abroad for 9 years. My husband is British, but we wanted to try living in Denmark, and so it was pure luck that this dream position opened. Luckily, my husband is also a scientist, and he found a lab that he wanted to work in.

Describe a typical day/week?

Our work varies considerably, and there is very little routine. Although we spend a significant amount of time in the office, our days can involve a wide range of activities, including attending pitch meetings, researching new technologies or biological pathways, and managing internal processes related to existing portfolio companies. At present, I am working on the end-of-year status, assessing the value and performance of our entire portfolio. There is no such thing as a typical working day, and we also need to be flexible and available outside normal working hours, for example to accommodate meetings with overseas partners. A substantial part of my role relates to portfolio company board work, including preparing for and participating in board meetings but also ad hoc strategic support. For example, I recently supported a portfolio company in developing their pitch deck and fundraising strategy. In practice, two representatives from our team are involved with each portfolio company: one serves as a full board member, typically a more senior colleague, while the other attends as an observer. Both are present at all meetings and contribute to the discussions. I am a currently board observer in four companies. We also regularly attend investor conferences, where we meet other investors and build professional networks.

Our industry is highly relationship-driven, particularly because we often co-invest with other funds. Strong personal relationships with co-investors are therefore essential. The same applies within our organisation, as we work very closely as a team on all cases, with a high level of collaboration. This was quite different from academia and something I was not initially accustomed to, but it is an aspect of the role that I now really enjoy.

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

Completing a PhD is one of the best forms of training for developing critical thinking, analytical skills, and project management capabilities. I use these skills daily, and I believe that a PhD is not only an education in research, but a broader training in problem-solving and decision-making. Many of the skills developed during a PhD are highly transferable. My PhD is essential for the role I perform, and this is reflected in the fact that all members of our team hold PhDs. This shared background allows us to rigorously assess scientific quality and make informed investment decisions in therapeutics. Furthermore, the ability to read and critically assess scientific literature, combined with a strong foundational knowledge, enables us to contribute at a high scientific level – both when evaluating new opportunities and when guiding development plans through our board roles.

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

The financial aspects of the role were new to me, but I learned quickly through hands-on experience. Teamwork—particularly how to present and discuss different viewpoints—and networking were also new to me because

during my PhD, I was largely working in isolation on my own project. Everything was driven by me, which made me highly focused, but it also meant that I did not prioritise networking. In hindsight, I wish I had done so earlier. This individual PhD project structure is very common, at least in my field, with many researchers effectively operating independently. This way of doing a PhD may also have been influenced by the environment; Cambridge is highly competitive.

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

In retrospect, I could have been more open to alternative career paths both before and during my PhD. For example, I never held a job alongside my studies because I was focused on my academic goals. Looking back, I could have gained valuable experience outside academia earlier, but I simply did not have the time without having to compromise on my level of academic ambition.

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

During the final year of my PhD, I began to consider whether I might want to pursue a different path. Until then, my thinking had followed a clear and linear trajectory—PhD, postdoctoral research, and ultimately a group leader position—so I had already secured a postdoctoral role before completing my PhD.

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

Do not be too close-minded about where you think you are going. Stay open to different possibilities and recognise the breadth of competencies you already have. It saddens me that

alternative careers are often framed as an option that should be considered “because not everyone is able to become a group leader” – alternative careers can also be an active choice for highly successful students. My other piece of advice is not to be afraid to be ambitious and aim high. It is okay to be talented and to say so out loud. I would never have ended up in this career if I had hidden my light under a bushel or been afraid to challenge myself.

Johan Luthman,

Executive Vice President, Lundbeck

By Nicole Renner



Education

1989: PhD in Neurobiology and Histology – Karolinska Institute

1984: DDS – Karolinska Institute

Jobs

2019- present: Lundbeck (Denmark) – Head of R&D

2014-2019: Eisai US – Head Clinical Development

2009-2013: Merck (USA) – Franchise Leader and Senior Program Leader Neuroscience R&D

2009: GeNeuro - CEO

2005-2009: Serono International / Merck Serono. Various Positions - Head Neurology, Immunology and Inflammation Therapy Area

1999-2005: AstraZeneca R&D: Director Bioscience - Director Translational Science

1997-1999: Astra R&D : Director of Cell Biology

What kind of position do you have today?

Executive Vice President at Lundbeck (Pharmaceutical Company with Neuroscience Focus). Head of Research and Development, Lundbeck.

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

I didn't decide, it just happened. I only decided to a certain extent, given that even before I obtained my dental degree, I found brain science very fascinating, so I started to work part time at the lab doing experimental work. I was, nonetheless, convinced that I was going to be a clinician, maybe a researcher-clinician. Before the industry, I also did some volunteering dentistry to help people in neglected areas. Later on, I got more and more engaged in research. I did my PhD at the Karolinska Institute, and then I took a postdoctoral fellowship in Denver, Colorado, USA; and after 1 year, one of my former PhD advisors called me and asked me if I wanted to take part in this pharmaceutical company called Astra (now: AstraZeneca). At the beginning I answered "no thanks, I want to go back and finish my specialist clinical training"; and I continued with my postdoc, but then, some time later, he

contacted me again and insisted to come join him in Sweden. And then I thought it would be a good idea to join industry for 1 or 2 years, as my first daughter had just been born and I wanted some economic stability. And here I am, many years later, I never left.

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

I have been in the pharmaceutical industry for a long time, and I've had different jobs positions within this industry, but it has always been in research or development. Before I joined the industry, as previously mentioned, I was a clinician and an academic researcher, up until I was about 30 years old. After that, I never worked as a dentist again.

How did you find your first job/current job?

As I mentioned, for my first job in Astra (Sweden), I was approached by my former PhD advisor, while I was doing a postdoc in the US. Then I got a really great job opportunity in a company called Serono in Geneva, Switzerland, after having been contacted by a recruitment firm. I was there for about 5 years, but then the company got acquired by Merck (Germany).

I left quite soon after that. For a while I was running my own little biotech company, but then I was called by the other Merck (USA) and I went to work there, in Pennsylvania. After 5 years, I got offer a job to work as the Head of Clinical Development at the company Eisai. Those were another 5 years. And for my current job, there was again a recruitment firm looking for a person to be the Head of R&D in Lundbeck, Copenhagen, Denmark, so they contacted me, and I have been working here ever since. For every job someone called me and asked me if I was interested in the job.

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

The person that first contacted me to join him in Astra, was a previous PhD supervisor of mine, that joined the pharmaceutical company before I finished my PhD studies.

Describe a typical day/week?

I basically sit in meetings, and write emails. My job is to lead people in this organization, so we try to find new biology, that we try to find drugs for, so we can influence a several variety of diseases: like Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Migraine and different pain conditions, amongst others. My job is not to be doing experiments in the lab anymore, but to lead people to doing their jobs, and decide what we are working towards. During my time in Lundbeck, we have brought 3 different drugs to the market. This is a very interesting and stimulating job, one needs to know a lot about the different diseases, and I need to be constantly reading and keep updated to bring up new ideas. Finally, my job requires a lot of traveling as well. We have branches of Lundbeck in several countries across the globe.

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

During my PhD studies I learned a lot about neuroscience, neuropharmacology, how the brain is built, and how the nervous system works. I basically learned medicine and the basics of drugs in the nervous system. My PhD was very important, and in some way a door-opener to the field that I later developed into. It was the platform I'm working on now.

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

I didn't get any business skills during my PhD, that I had the need to develop later. After all, I'm running a business, I'm the executive of a company, so I need to understand finance, and business decisions that go way beyond research and development. I had to learn a lot about budgeting, taking care of personnel, human resources, compliance, etc. It was a lot of practical business skills, but also at a higher level, business strategy and tactics in how to successfully run things in the pharmaceutical industry. Some things I learned by working in this field, but I also received business training while working in industry.

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

I often say that "life has no placebo group". So, it's really hard to know. Sometimes I think "I wish I had done this and that...", but in the end I don't think it's that important, because in some manner you end up with the job you got, and I think the most important thing for me was to get into the field of neuroscience and get contacts across the field, both in academia and in the industry. I honestly don't think I would have done things differently.

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

I didn't really plan so much. As explained previously, I did a postdoc, and then I received a phone call. That was it.

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

"Don't be afraid to move". Careers are really made because you are willing to do something new, and that, sometimes, fortunately or unfortunately, implies that you must move to another country, maybe to a different continent. And that sometimes comes at a price with your private life, and the people that you may have to leave behind; but it also brings new friends and opportunities. I would say, never be afraid of moving, never be afraid of testing something new, if it looks interesting enough. The first move is the hardest, the second one is a little easier, and the third one is routine. I always say that a PhD degree is like a "driver's license", I think the most important thing is that during this time you learn to finish pretty long-term projects. To learn about dedication and discipline to finish a project.

Jacob Funk Kirkegaard,

Senior Research Fellow, Peterson Institute

By Peter Trier

What kind of position do you have today?

I currently hold two positions, the first is as Senior Research Fellow at Peterson Institute and also as a Senior Fellow at Bruegel. Both economic knowledge institutions. “PhD is a mandatory requirement to be a Senior Fellow” says Jacob. Furthermore, the PhD itself provides weight to both your opinions and is essential for grant application processes and publications. Jacob also claims that the career benefit of the PhD is on a rise, as private companies are actively investing in the scientific domain in order to increase their value for customers and stay relevant through verifiable knowledge creation.

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

“The PhD seemed a natural step, and was funded by Peterson Institute. Sweet deal, but ended up taking almost 6 years to complete though”. Jacob concludes that his strong interest in politics, history and economics, and the value of being a PhD made the process less painful. But Jacob also mentioned that his PhD often had taken the back seat compared to his work obligations, and this prolonged the PhD process.

Fortunately, interwoven academic PhD research and work was both encouraged by his employers and substantively overlapped, as Jacob did while working on his PhD publish two other book-length manuscripts with the Peterson Institute. Ultimately, while time and labour intensive, the work + PhD studies turned out to be a good strategy in the end. Building multilayered competences and network, by combining academia with real world experience.

Describe a typical day/week?

No weeks are alike, there is a constant juggling between speaking, meeting obligations and article writing. Combined with a busy travel schedule attending both political, scientific and commercial meetings. Another major part of Jacobs routine, is media obligations ranging from internal tv interviews to consulting leaders from industry, finance and politics. Jacob concludes that this interleaved work-lifestyle is one of the key experiences from his PhD studies. Working on a project with many facets and no fixed outcome, is outside the comfort zone of most.



Education

2012: PhD in Political Economy, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore

2002: MSc in International Finance/Business; Columbia University, New York

Jobs

2024-present: Senior Fellow Bruegel

2002-present: Senior Fellow Peterson Institute

2020-2024: Senior Fellow German Marshall Fund

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

The ability to cut away the noise and focus on the key factors regarding a complex problem. And the courage to establish a knowledge-based opinion on subjects. This approach is based on analytic methods and a theoretical foundation from his PhD work. And most importantly the confidence to believe that you are right about a subject, disregarding opposition.

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

"Networking is not taught at the university", and is something that maybe comes naturally to some, but also is with certainty a bigger part of professional work in the United States than in Denmark. We discussed his LinkedIn approach, and Jacob gets many connection requests almost daily because of his public appearances, but ignores most. But he recommends a specific rule to whether to accept a request or not; "Would you actually recommend a given person to someone in your network you respect?" asks Jacob. It can be tempting to grow your network, but unless you have actually met or interacted with the person to what end? His approach is to evaluate and value any part of your network, and try to make sure it is working both ways. Not trying to grow a mere number of connections, but rather develop a truer representation of people that you actually have interacted adequately with in order to have an opinion about their professional capabilities.

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

"Avoid the trap of perfection in your PhD, get it done!". View the PhD as a platform for further development, and don't get stuck there. Perfection is achieved over time constantly iterating. "How many has won the Nobel prize based on their PhD work alone? not many!". Concludes Jacob. "It is what lies beyond that matters". There are many scientific job options out there, but few people are discovered by employers if holed up in their study chamber. Interacting with the world, even while finishing your PhD is important and helps candidates to avoid becoming too dependent on just the academic weight of their thesis – this again helps mitigate against the "trap of perfection". Networking is an active choice, and personal contacts are often what matters when new job opportunities must be discovered. "And don't underestimate the power of helping others – it helps you master a task better yourself and people remember". "Try to gain the confidence to become self-referencing!" Jacob concludes with a smile.

Thien Vinh Luong,

CEO and founder of Noutron ApS

By Simon Koed Kjær



Education

2023: PhD in Health, Aarhus University

2018: MD, Health, Aarhus University

Jobs

2023 - present: Postdoctoral researcher, Steno Diabetes Center Aarhus

2020 - present: Founder and CEO, Noutron ApS, Aarhus

What kind of position do you have today?

Thien is CEO and founder of Noutron ApS, an Aarhus-based sports nutrition company. Alongside this, he works as a postdoc in exercise nutrition with a focus on carbohydrate metabolism.

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

Thien comes from a background as an elite runner, where performance, pushing limits and understanding the body have always played a central role. His research interests in nutrition and carbohydrate metabolism naturally aligned with this. There were several reasons behind his choice. He has a strong interest in human performance – something he describes as “con amore”. He thrives when he can be his own boss and values the flexibility and freedom it gives. This allows him to build things without being limited by systems that often move slower than he does. At the same time, he felt a strong ambition to create something entirely from scratch – outside the “safe system”. He also observes how the public healthcare system is shaped politically, including staffing shortages, which made him

even more motivated to carve out his own path. Continuing to build Noutron is part of designing the life he wants to live – for example living in Italy with his partner. And stepping into a startup meant taking risks, which he calls a bit “un-Danish”.

What were the challenges associated with starting up?

Entering a completely new world without a mentor, where he had to figure everything out himself, including very practical aspects. Problem-solving alone became everyday life. Also dose of what he calls “optimistic arrogance”: being a medical doctor and PhD does not automatically translate into real-world sales or business success. The uncertainty of not knowing whether the project would succeed or collapse – with no guarantees or safety nets. And scaling the company: as with all private businesses, it is about business development and finding the right levers to pull to create growth, selecting the right ideas and executing on them.

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

Way back, before the PhD, Thien worked for half a year

in a humanitarian NGO and also coached at an athletics club. Noutron CEO was his first role outside academia.

What contacts – if any, did you have at the company/workplace/university before you started? Which contacts helped you start and/or continue the journey?

Startup phase:

- Flemming Krabbenhøft, Lactotechnology ApS, who helped through his network with registration, taxes, logistics, sourcing raw materials and more.
- Startvækst Aarhus, a municipal programme.
- The Kitchen at Aarhus University, which provided university-based startup support.

Scaling phase:

- Nordic Female Founders ApS, especially Anne Stampe Olesen, whom he connected with through Løvens Hule.
- His primary business partner, Mathias Busk Sælgen, as well as Flemming, Anne Stampe and Johannes.

Describe a typical day/week.

“There is nothing typical in my life.” Working full-time in research and full-time in business means he has to optimise his time. His workweek is around 60 hours. Much of the work is in front of the computer and around eight meetings per week – but there is also conceptual development. His time shifts between research and business, constantly juggling deadlines from two different worlds, while generating ideas in both.

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

Troubleshooting and problem-solving, not accepting a mindset of “we can’t do that”, structuring daily work and planning ahead, project management and academic communication.

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

Understanding the different types of people you meet outside academia: Communication with business partners, producers, logistics, and regulatory authorities works differently than scientific communication. Therefore realising that academia is a closed system where everyone speaks the same “language” – which is not the case elsewhere. And not taking yourself or your degrees too seriously if you want the business and partnerships to grow

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

He would not change much. The academic understanding he gained during his PhD gives him a unique profile, also compared to competitors. The most important skill he took with him is curiosity – the drive to learn new things.

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

Around a year before finishing, when planning postdoc projects. At that time, and still, he couldn’t live off Noutron alone.

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

Regarding startups: “Entrepreneurship is incredibly hard.” A good idea is not enough – you need to be in it with your whole soul. It should feel like a game

you can stay in 24/7. And remember that many career paths exist - be open to them and actively seek them out.

Diana Buus Hussmann,

Product Specialist, Arla Foods Ingredients

*By Stine Bundgaard
Birkebæk*



What kind of position do you have today?

Dianna Buus Hussmann is employed at Arla Food Ingredients in the Production Technology and Development department as a product specialist. She is responsible for a specific product group, where she manages operational challenges, supports optimization of production processes, and contributes to the transition of products from R&D to full-scale manufacturing. She describes herself as a gatekeeper for the production.

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

After finishing her PhD, Dianna knew she wanted to move in a different direction than academia. She was motivated by the possibility of working with tangible products and being involved in their development on a practical level. She was also attracted to a project-oriented company structure with many different functions, where collaboration across departments forms an essential part of the work.

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

Dianna's job as a product

specialist is her first job after finishing her PhD.

How did you find your first job/current job?

When Dianna was near the end of her PhD she started to look for jobs. She found this job on Jobindex, where she applied. The job was at that time a maternity leave cover described with the title product specialist/product manager.

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

When Dianna applied for the position, she did not know anyone at Arla who could recommend her. However, she had an acquaintance employed there, and she reached out to him on LinkedIn to hear his opinion of the company as a workplace. Furthermore, after submitting her application, Dianna contacted the person listed in the job advertisement to ask whether her profile could be of relevance. She explained her motivation for pursuing a path outside academia and outlined why she believed her experience and competencies were well suited to the role in this job.

Education

2022: PhD in Biomarkers in leukemia, Department of Biomedicine, Aarhus University

2016: MSc in Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

2013: MSc in Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

Jobs

2022- present: Product Specialist, Arla Foods Ingredients

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical day for Dianna involves numerous meetings. Each morning begins with a morning briefing about operational updates. Throughout the day, she attends scheduled meetings related to process optimizations, product development, deviations, and production challenges. She frequently adjusts priorities in response to sudden issues arising in the production process. Her work is highly cross-functional, involving collaboration with multiple departments. She doesn't spend a lot of time on data analysis, maximum 2 hours per day, therefore her role is less focused on deep technical investigation and details compared to her PhD work.

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

The skills Dianna benefits from most from her PhD are the ability to quickly understand new topics and ask inquisitive questions. She frequently draws on her broad scientific knowledge rather than her specific area of expertise she gained doing the PhD. Her experience from the PhD regarding handling complex problems and seeing the bigger picture is particularly valuable in her current role.

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

Dianna developed skills after her PhD that she had not acquired during her studies, including an understanding of organizational structures, supply chain management, how a company operates, and practical knowledge of processes in large-scale production. She did not have a proper understanding of this before starting the job, as it was not something she had learned during her PhD.

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

No, Dianna would not have done anything different. She took a project management course, as well as the course prepare yourself on the movement from a PhD in Health to a career in non-academia, which helped her to reflect on the direction she wanted to take after finishing the PhD. She chose her PhD out of curiosity, but after she explored her PhD topic in depth, she was motivated by pursuing something new.

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

Dianna has always thought about her next career step and has always found it exciting to know the available opportunities after the PhD. She did not want to commit too early doing the PhD, instead she tried to form an idea of potential paths without making an early decision. During her PhD, she carefully considered which courses to take, such as the project management course, to gain knowledge that could help open doors for future opportunities. She started to explore her opportunities when she had around 6 months left of the PhD, and if she saw an interesting job advertisement she applied.

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

Dianna's advice for someone about to finish their PhD is to take the course prepare yourself on the movement from a PhD in Health to a career in non-academia. Furthermore, be clear about what aspects of work you want more or less of, and do not be afraid to reach out to companies. Use your network to understand what different positions involve, and look up job catalogues and archives, to learn about job titles and opportunities. If a position interests you,

call the contact person to explain your background and motivation, even if your profile does not perfectly match the role. Finally, remain open to a variety of positions and opportunities.

Maibritt Nørgaard Lauridsen,

Clinical Genomics Specialist, ARCEDI Biotech

By Stine Mary Vissing



What kind of position do you have today?

Maibritt is a Clinical Genomics Specialist at ARCEDI Biotech in Aarhus. In this position, she is responsible for the daily NGS workflow. This includes supporting the laboratory technicians with wet-lab procedures such as library preparation and setting up runs on the instrument. In addition, she is responsible for subsequent dry-lab steps, including QC and data analysis. She also handles process optimization, such as optimizing protocols and instrument runs and by testing new kits.

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

Although Maibritt enjoyed doing research and therefore continued as a postdoc following her PhD, she knew that she didn't want to pursue a long-term academic career. She wanted a more stable and secure position without the constant pressure of applying for funding to secure her own salary. In addition to stability, remaining in the Aarhus area was a key priority for her to maintain a balanced family life. Since ARCEDI was still a small start-up when Maibritt was hired, she was involved in the development and optimization of workflows and protocols,

allowing her to maintain a research-driven focus in her work. As the company has grown, her responsibilities have gradually evolved into more daily routine operational tasks but still include optimization of protocols and process improvement.

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, Maibritt continued to do a postdoc in the same research group. Although she had a three-year contract she got her current job after 1.5 years into her postdoc. She has now been working in her current position at ARCEDI for 3.5 years and will be transitioning into a new position within the company from 1st of December.

How did you find your first job/current job?

Maibritt found her position at ARCEDI through LinkedIn and her network. While working as a postdoc, she actively kept an eye on available opportunities and came across the job advertisement for her current job in a LinkedIn post. She already knew a little about the company because

Education

2020: PhD in Identification of novel biomarkers in prostate cancer to improve clinical management

2015: MSc in Molecular Medicine

Jobs

2025-present: Senior Clinical Genomics Specialist & Head of NGS wet-lab Operations, ARCEDI Biotech

2022-2025: Clinical Genomics Specialist, ARCEDI Biotech

2020-2022: Post Doc at Department of Molecular Medicine

her research group was collaborating with them on project, and she also knew one of the employees there, whom she reached out to when applying.

Describe a typical day/week?

The clinical genomics specialists have a rotating operational week. In such a week, two days are spent being involved in setting up a run of samples and two days are spent analyzing the data. Other than that, Maibritt's typical day/week varies a lot and includes many meetings related to different projects including both academics and laboratory technicians. Every two weeks she also attends a meeting with the department of clinical genomics to discuss data and results. In between meetings, Maibritt is planning tests and experiments in the laboratory and is coordinating which samples should be run and when. She also prepares documentations for accreditation including validation reports and updated protocols.

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

One skill that Maibritt developed doing her PhD which remains important in her daily work today, is the ability to plan and structure her time and tasks and documenting every step of her work. She also learned to reach out and communicate with professionals from diverse backgrounds such as bioinformaticians, laboratory technicians and clinicians. Additionally, she gained hands-on experience with NGS, including performing her own library preparation and analyzing the resulting data, a key skill for daily work today.

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

Through her employment in ARCEDI, Maibritt learned about working in an accredited laboratory.

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

There is nothing specific Maibritt would have done differently. She simply did what she was most excited about and focused on the topics and methodologies that she found interesting and that motivated her.

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

Maibritt completed her bachelor project, masters project and her PhD in the same laboratory at MOMA. She enjoyed doing research and was motivated to work within the cancer field which led her to continue as a postdoc in the same research group. However, she knew she was not aiming for a long-term academic career and after working many years in the same research group she also wanted a change of environment. Therefore, she actively looked for job opportunities in both private companies and the hospital, already shortly after beginning her postdoc position.

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

Use your network and connect and follow people and companies that interest you on LinkedIn. Keep an eye out for job opening to explore opportunities, start your search early, and don't hesitate to just try to apply and do the interview. Focus on what you enjoy doing and look for positions that include those activities.

Martin Birkmose Rasmussen,

Research Scientist, Nordic Bioscience

By Yousef Tal



Education

2023: PhD in Health Science (Health AU, Department of Molecular Medicine)

2020: MSc in Molecular Medicine

Jobs

2024-present: Research Scientist at Nordic Bioscience

2023-2024: Postdoc at Department of Molecular medicine

Aug 2020 - Oct 2020: Research assistant at Department of Molecular Medicine

2018-2020: Editor at Ordbogen.com

What kind of position do you have today?

Martin is hired as a research scientist in the oncology team at Nordic Bioscience A/S.

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

Martin explains that the choice to move into biotech stemmed from a desire to continue doing science while having a more tangible impact beyond academic publications. He wanted the results to have real-world impact and to work in an environment with a better work/life balance. All of this led Martin towards research in Biotech/industry.

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

This is Martin's first job outside of academia. His PhD and postdoctoral work aligned closely with the scientific background Nordic Bioscience was seeking.

How did you find your first job/current job?

The opportunity came through a job posting he encountered on LinkedIn and JobIndex. Martin found the position interesting and an ideal match for his profile, and after applying, he was hired following the second interview.

What contacts – if any, did you have before you started?

Martin did not have any contacts at Nordic Bioscience prior to starting.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical week for Martin is mainly split between outreach and facilitating connections with scientific collaborators, along with data analysis and bioinformatics on ongoing and new projects. A smaller portion of his schedule goes towards writing abstracts and preparing posters/presentations for conferences, as he and his colleagues participate in several conferences each year. Depending on where they are in the process, he also contributes to writing papers based on their scientific findings and helps translate scientific results into figures and material for business outreach and business development.

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

His strongest assets from his PhD are his data analysis and bioinformatics skills, alongside the project management expertise developed through independent research.

His knowledge and experience in clinical research and especially translational research are a huge benefit in a position where he is responsible for most of the company's clinical collaborations.

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

Martin strengthened his relational/networking skills and presentation skills a lot. He further developed skills in communication, especially when addressing audiences outside academia.

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

Martin would have focused more on how to transition out of from academia, especially in terms of which skills he should highlight when applying for jobs, and how he should frame his profile to people outside of academia. He would have spent more time strengthening his transferable/soft skills and less on improving skills in very specific niches.

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

By the final year of his PhD, Martin already knew he wanted to pursue something different from academia. He did not actively pursue his next career step until 2 months after finishing his postdoc, following a trip abroad immediately after the postdoc ended.

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

Consider what is most important for you: The type of job you would like to have or your geographical location. After some time of unemployment, Martin realized that the types of jobs he wanted were mainly located in the

Copenhagen area. After relocating he very quickly found a job.

How would you describe the level of flexibility and creativity in your role compared to academic research?

The level of flexibility and creativity is still high in his current position, although different from academia. He has more freedom to pursue other avenues in a project, or abandon projects without significant findings, compared to academia, as his salary is not bound to specific research projects. Working in a smaller company preserves his autonomy, allowing him to explore new ideas as long as they are well-justified.

How do deadlines and time pressures in your current position differ from those in academia?

Deadlines in industry are more frequent, yet the pressure is noticeably lower. Work does not need to be perfect by each deadline, and the company places stronger emphasis on maintaining a healthy work-life balance.

PhD's working in the public sector

Trine Block Mattesen,

Clinical Academic at Department of Clinical Pathology, Vejle Sygehus

By Camilla Merrild



Education

2020: PhD at Department of Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

2015: MSc in Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

2013: BSc in Biomedicine, University of Southern Denmark

Jobs

2021-present: Clinical Academic at Department of Clinical Pathology, Vejle Sygehus

2020: Postdoc at Department of Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

2016: Scientific Assistant

What kind of position do you have today?

I work as a clinical academic at the Department of Clinical Pathology, Vejle Sygehus, Sygehus Lillebælt. Why did you decide to go in the career direction you chose? Before my current job, I was employed as a scientific assistant, PhD student and Postdoc at the department of Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University Hospital. After five exciting years in the colorectal cancer research group, I was ready to try something new and preferably find a position close to the clinic. I was ready to make a change in my career and maybe leave academia to come closer to the clinic. Leaving academia was also motivated by factors such as feeling more financially secure and in general the opportunity for a better work-life balance. When I started my job search, different vacant positions as clinical academics were available and I was lucky to be offered my current job.

Describe a typical day/week

No two days are the same, but the core task of my job is molecular analysis of samples from cancer patients, which contributes to diagnostics and clinical decision-making. We also perform development tasks and implementation and validation of new analyses/laboratory equipment. In addition, we also participate in research projects and different communication tasks such as teaching trainee doctors.

How did you find your current job?

I found the job through an online job posting.

Was having a PhD a requirement for getting your current job?

It was preferred for my specific position. However, my team consists of clinical academics with and without a PhD degree.

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

My strong background in cancer biology, critical thinking skills, laboratory experience and project management.

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

I have developed many exciting new skills such as variant interpretation and classification of genomic somatic variants, how to implement and validate new molecular analyses and in general how to work in a clinical setting where our results are used directly in clinical decision-making for each specific patient.

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

In general, I think it is a good idea to think about/establish some goals about how you want to live your life after your PhD; think about goals for your work-life balance early in your career. If you are thinking about leaving academia like I was, then it is a good idea to look at the job market early during your PhD and see if you can acquire some of the required skills during your PhD/postdoc. You should always remember to be open-minded and believe in yourself.



Jasper Nijkamp,

Head of Innovation and International Affairs, Aarhus University Hospital

By Frederik Skovbjerg

Education

2012: PhD in (Un)certainties in radiotherapy for rectal cancer, NKI-AVL (Netherlands Cancer Institute) and University of Amsterdam

2000: MSc (cand.scient.) in Medical Informatics, the Netherlands

Jobs

2024-present: Head of Innovation and International Affairs, Aarhus University Hospital

2024-present: Co-director for BETA.HEALTH

2020-present: Associate Professor, Tumor Imaging and Segmentation, Danish Center for Particle Therapy, Aarhus University

2021-2022: Programme Director, Master Talent Programme, AU Health

2019-2020: Fellow, BioMedical Design, Novo Nordisk Foundation

2018-2019: Visiting Research Fellow, Aarhus University Hospital

2011-2019: Postdoc, Image-Guided Oncology, NKI-AVL, Amsterdam

2009-2012: PhD Student, Radiotherapy Research, NKI-AVL

2005-2010: Image-Guided Radiotherapy Implementation Specialist, NKI-AVL

What kind of position do you have today?

Jasper is Head of Innovation and International Affairs at Aarhus University Hospital. The department coordinates innovation activities across the hospital, connects clinical staff with technology partners, oversees international collaborations, and manages the national programme Beta Health, funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation. His role spans strategic development, stakeholder management, and implementation of innovation initiatives that support the hospital's transformation agenda. He reports directly to the hospital director and leads a department comprising innovation specialists, project managers, and the 3D Lab AUH.

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

Jasper describes his career as a series of opportunities shaped by curiosity and a strong motivation to create tangible improvements

for patients. After almost two decades in imaging research and clinical implementation, he increasingly sought positions where he could influence larger organisational structures and support clinicians in delivering high-value care. His transition into innovation leadership was triggered partly by dissatisfaction with the structural limitations of academic career progression and partly by a desire to contribute at a system level. He emphasises that innovation roles allow him to work across departments and disciplines, which aligns with his professional identity as someone who thrives at interfaces rather than within silos.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current job? How did they lead to your current job?

Jasper's early career was unusual compared with typical academic trajectories.

Instead of entering a PhD programme directly, he joined a clinical implementation team where he translated imaging research into clinical tools. This experience established his long-term interest in bridging research and practice. His subsequent PhD and postdoc years broadened his technical expertise: radiotherapy optimisation, surgical navigation, 3D pathology, and image-guided interventions. During this period, he also learned the challenges of academic career structures, including the vulnerability of temporary contracts and the dependency on senior group leaders. A conflict with a supervisor eventually led him to pursue a sabbatical in Denmark, which opened a new professional chapter. The BioMedical Design fellowship was pivotal: it exposed him to needs-driven innovation, provided a new professional network, and ultimately led to research and then leadership opportunities at Aarhus University Hospital. This combination of implementation experience, clinical collaboration, and innovation training positioned him strongly for his current role.

How did you find your first job/current job?

The position as Head of Innovation arose unexpectedly. Jasper applied unsuccessfully for a related innovation role, which became a turning point. When the previous head announced resignation, he reached out informally to explore possibilities. A brief exploratory meeting with the director evolved into a formal recruitment process, and he was appointed shortly after. He notes that this shift was not planned but aligned well with his competencies and motivations.

What contacts – if any – did you have before you started?

Jasper had prior collaborations with AUH through research projects, his

BioMedical Design fellowship, and his sabbatical in 2018. These connections improved his familiarity with the Danish system but were not decisive for the role. The recruitment process was based primarily on his track record in imaging, clinical implementation, and innovation activities.

Describe a typical day/week.

His work is characterised by substantial variation but dominated by strategic responsibilities. A large proportion of his time is dedicated to stakeholder management, including meetings with regional and national partners, clinical departments, and external collaborators. He is currently heavily involved in preparing the next major funding application for Beta Health, which involves coordinating contributions from multiple university hospitals, drafting programme documents, and managing the interplay between stakeholder expectations and funding requirements. In parallel, he leads the development of an innovation strategy for AUH, focusing on how the hospital can support clinicians in delivering high-value care under increasing resource constraints. Internal responsibilities include team leadership, budget oversight, organisational development, and strengthening the hospital's innovation culture. He describes the department as evolving from a start-up phase toward a more structured and strategic unit.

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

Jasper highlights analytical thinking, problem formulation, and the ability to engage with complex technical content. His PhD and postdoc years trained him to handle long-term research processes, manage uncertainty, and design systematic workflows—competencies that translate well into innovation

strategy and large-scale programme development. He also emphasises the importance of communication skills and the capacity to explain complex concepts to diverse professional groups.

What skills did you not develop during your PhD that you have developed afterwards?

Leadership and organisational development stand out. Jasper entered his current role without formal leadership training and had to learn team management, conflict resolution, and organisational navigation on the job. He has also gained extensive experience in stakeholder management, strategy development, and working across institutional boundaries—areas rarely encountered during a traditional research career. In addition, the BioMedical Design fellowship equipped him with needs-driven innovation methodologies, user engagement, and business understanding, which are central to his current responsibilities.

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

Jasper notes that he would not necessarily change the technical focus of his PhD but reflects that academic career structures can be unpredictable and dependent on factors beyond performance. He emphasises the importance of cultivating broad networks, gaining interdisciplinary exposure, and being open to alternative career paths early on.

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

He did not plan his career in a linear way. Only after reaching the senior postdoc stage did he begin to reflect systematically on long-term options. In contrast to many PhD students who

envision a traditional academic trajectory, Jasper sees careers as dynamic and opportunity-driven, often shaped by external circumstances.

What specific career advice would you give to someone who is about to finish their PhD?

Jasper's central message is to focus on what motivates you and brings you energy. He encourages early-career researchers to identify which elements of their work they enjoy (technical depth, collaboration, teaching, implementation, or strategic development) and use this insight to navigate future opportunities. He also stresses the importance of curiosity, adaptability, and the willingness to explore roles outside established disciplinary boundaries. Careers do not unfold as linear paths, and meaningful opportunities often arise through openness rather than long-term planning.

Jacob Thyrsted Johansen,

Special consultant, Aarhus University

By Lena Anastasia Magdalena Nielsen



What kind of position do you have today?

Special consultant at AU. Permanent position.

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

I realized that the academic path would require several years abroad, publications in high-impact journals, and a long, uncertain climb toward a semi-permanent position, which does not align well with having a child and wanting more stability. Although I was tempted to pursue a postdoc, it felt like postponing an inevitable decision; I knew that if I was going to leave academia, it made more sense to do so sooner rather than later. In the end, the idea of spending years abroad and continuing a path that no longer fits my priorities convinced me to explore a different direction.

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

After finishing my PhD, I moved directly into a Medical Design fellowship

sponsored by Novo Nordisk, which is a program I had been exposed to during my PhD and had long known I wanted to pursue. It offered a way to apply my medical knowledge while developing new skills beyond academia. My first industry job was at UV Medico – a leading supplier of Far-UVC products, focused on decontamination of Cleanrooms and Healthcare facilities – where I had already been working part-time during my PhD. I eventually left because our expectations no longer met; I wanted more flexibility, and they had requirements I couldn't fulfill. I then returned to the university in my current position. They valued my extensive fundraising experience during my PhD as well as my background with the medical design fellowship, which they were interested in expanding and promoting.

How did you find your first job/current job?

For both the Medical Design

Education

2022: PhD in Biomedicine – Integrated PhD Program

2020: MSc in Biology, Aarhus University

2018: BSc in Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs

2024-present: Special consultant, at the Centre for Sustainable Agrifood Systems, AU.

2023: Sector Manager, at UV Medico

2022-23: Medical Design Fellow, sponsored by Novo Nordisk.

fellowship sponsored by Novo Nordisk and my current position, I simply applied from the job posting I got accepted.

At UV Medico, I already had contact through my PhD.

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

At UV Medico, having my PhD supervisor as one of the company's CEOs helped me secure the position.

For the Medical Design fellowship, I had already built a strong connection with one of the instructors through the medical innovation day, an event I attended twice, where I networked with her, discussed my interests, and received guidance on what to prioritize in the application.

Describe a typical day/week?

As a Medical Design fellow, my days were filled with teaching and passing on what we had learned, along with hands-on project management, such as coordinating with product developers, making sure their work aligned with customer needs, and identifying and contacting potential customers.

At UV Medico, I was taking on responsibilities in project leadership and business development, using my expertise to explore new commercial directions for the product.

In my current role, my weeks revolve around networking, meeting with collaborators, contributing to project development, and organizing events such as seminars, conferences, and retreats within the Centre for Sustainable Agri-food Systems.

What accomplishment in industry are you most proud of so far?

During the 10 months Medical Design fellowship, we developed a spinout focused on a new device for women with

urinary incontinence, particularly those who had multiple children. I designed the prototype using a 3D printer before we could test it successfully in pigs. It gave me a strong sense of accomplishment as it was exciting to create something entirely new and to apply skills I had never used before, to see that it was eventually working in a living model.

What was the biggest challenge in preparing your CV/resumé for industry roles?

I have had two main challenges. First, industry looks for something very different from academia, so it was difficult to translate my transferable skills, especially when they weren't interested in whether I could run experiments but in how I could contribute more broadly.

Second, finding roles that felt like a good fit was hard; I often read job descriptions and felt unqualified, even though many of my skills were actually relevant and applicable.

How did your previous roles influence your choice and experience in your current position?

After my time at UV Medico, my CV felt less attractive to industry due to short job durations (less than a year each) following my PhD, which made me concerned about being seen as someone who might not be reliable. When I started my current role, it was not exactly what I initially wanted to do, but I saw it as an opportunity to strengthen my CV. Over time, I have come to really enjoy it, especially because the variety of projects keeps the work stimulating and prevents boredom.

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

Overall, my PhD gave me strong project management skills, such as

understanding progress, identifying what needs strengthening, and keeping a project moving forward. It also fostered the curiosity and adaptability that are required to learn new things and step outside my comfort zone, which has been an advantage in every role since.

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

One key skill I developed after my PhD was the ability to clearly identify real world problems and understand the broader societal needs behind them. During the PhD, the focus is primarily science-based, and not really problem-based from a societal perspective.

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

This course really started my reflection on what I wanted to do with my PhD, realizing I wasn't going to stay in academia and thinking about what I would take with me that was actually useful in society. I began looking for courses that could help me position myself better for what industry expects and started adjusting my mindset toward an industry career. Looking back, I would have liked to gain more technical skills, especially coding.

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

Halfway through my PhD, I was in a privileged position because I had already published papers early in my PhD. That meant I was not stressed at the end of the PhD and had the time to focus on what I wanted to do next.

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

From my own experience, I would say not to search for the perfect job right away. One is unlikely to go straight from a PhD into a dream position. It is better to take a job where one can learn something and use that experience to move toward the next role, rather than sitting back and waiting, as that ultimately becomes a waste of time. I would also suggest being curious about the first job, as one might discover unexpected interests. Finally, I would advise not to compromise on core values, such as family life or hobbies, and to be able to identify what matters most.

What surprised you the most about working in industry compared to academia?

What surprised me most was how highly people in industry regard a PhD. Within academia, one mainly sees postdocs and professors who have been in the field for years, so a PhD might feel like the bottom of the hierarchy. However, outside academia, it is viewed as a significant achievement, and holders of a PhD are often treated as more credible, which can feel intimidating when the feeling is not the same inside. It was also striking how much more important transferable skills are compared to technical knowledge alone.

How would you describe the work-life balance in your current position?

In my current position is excellent, almost perfect. The job is very flexible and comes with good benefits. I believe that it is more important to focus on results rather than time spent in the office. Being present for eight hours does not necessarily equate to eight hours of productive work, so a rigid schedule does not make sense to me.

Where do you see your career in the next 5-10 years?

In the next 5-10 years, I hope to return to industry at some point. Currently, due to family considerations, it makes staying in my current role the best option. In the longer term, I also dream of starting my own company once my children are older. The Medical Design fellowship gave me skills that would help me towards that goal. Before having children, I imagined traveling extensively and taking a top role in a company, but parenthood has completely changed my perspective, and I continue to reflect on how priorities and career paths evolve over time.



Leonardo Bonetti,

Associate professor at the Center for Music in the Brain, Department of Health, Aarhus University

*By Paul Jaques Gilbert
Maublanc*

Education

2020: PhD in cognitive neuroscience at the Center for Music in the Brain, Aarhus University

2016: MSc in Psychology, University of Bologna

Jobs

Present: Associate professor, Aarhus University

2021-2024: Research Fellow, University of Oxford

Professor Leonardo Bonetti is an associate professor at the Center for Music in the Brain, Department of Health, Aarhus University. His work focuses on memory, audition, aging, and music. I would like to report some of his thoughts, which I hope will be inspiring for our readers.

He holds a master's degree in classical guitar and a master's degree in psychology, both from Bologna, Italy, as well as a PhD in cognitive neuroscience from Aarhus University. Later, he invested heavily in learning data analysis and coding. Neuroscience is inherently multidisciplinary, and this diverse background has been essential for him, both in understanding complex problems and in developing new analytical approaches.

Interestingly, another career path could have been possible for Professor Bonetti, as he was once a professional classical guitarist.

Earlier in life, he also dreamed of becoming a football player, although that was never a realistic option, even if he was not too bad.

Nevertheless, becoming a scientist was one of his early goals. Neuroscience attracted him because it is still a relatively young field with enormous potential for discovery. Understanding the brain is one of the most important scientific challenges of our time, and the idea of contributing, even in a small way, to that understanding has always been deeply motivating for him. Ultimately, the intellectual curiosity and long-term fulfilment he found in science led him to choose research as his career path.

As a young associate professor, he is about to supervise his first PhD student as a main supervisor, even though he has already successfully co-supervised several PhD students.

This represents another important step forward in his career, which he believes comes primarily from hard work, a necessary but not sufficient condition. More specifically, he has always aimed to be rigorous in his scientific training, to learn the right tools, and to build real competence. At the same time, he has been strategic: choosing the right projects, investing energy where it matters most, and making decisions that support long-term development. Diversifying opportunities and attempts has also been crucial. From the outside, people often see only the successes, but behind them lie countless failures and rejections that are simply part of the process. These setbacks are unavoidable, but they are also deeply instructive. Learning from them has been just as important as the achievements themselves.

His main challenges today involve managing projects and supervising students while still finding time to study, learn, and keep himself updated. The more responsibilities he takes on, the more intentional he needs to be in protecting time for deep work and continued growth.

For example, growth could come from collaboration with the industry. He has not done much of that so far, but recently he has become more interested in exploring these possibilities. Such collaborations are not always easy to establish, but they can be very valuable, both for scientific impact and for the translation of methods and findings beyond the academic world.

Looking ahead, Professor Bonetti priority is to help his PhD students and the researchers in his group complete their projects and grow professionally. Beyond that, he wants to continue developing analytical methods for

neuroscience, particularly in relation to memory, aging, audition, and music. He also aims to secure more funding so that he can maintain and expand the excellent team of people he is fortunate to work with.

If he could offer one piece of advice to his past student self, it would be to work very hard. Without commitment, a PhD is simply not worth it. Have a clear plan and strategy; there are many tasks to manage, and structure is essential. Surround yourself with people you can trust and learn from, and remain humble toward science. At the same time, be firm: protect your time and avoid investing energy in people who do not work in a mature, professional, or constructive way. There are a lot of them in the world.

Professor Bonetti also highlighted the role of the university structure in supporting his work. Aarhus University, he explains, offers an outstanding organizational environment. The administrative staff and support systems help researchers feel respected, safe, and never alone when challenges arise. This kind of support, he believes, is invaluable. Of course, a PhD and an academic career ultimately depend on personal effort and perseverance, but working in an environment that genuinely supports researchers makes a significant difference.

This concludes my interview with Professor Bonetti, and I am grateful that he generously gave his time. In a time when Neuroscience is facing renewed scrutiny due to concerns about the replicability of results, his commitment to rigor and methodology makes me confident the next generation of neuroscientist will overcome these challenges.



Henriette Sylvain Thomsen,

Clinical academic at Molekylær
Medicinsk Afdeling (MOMA), Aarhus
University Hospital

By Sandra Hansen

What kind of position do you have today?

I am employed as a clinical academic at Molekylær Medicinsk Afdeling (MOMA), Aarhus University Hospital, Skejby. I am part of the diagnostic group and in my team, we perform whole genome profiling of cancer patients with metastatic and incurable disease.

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

It was somewhat coincidental, as I was on maternity leave and had not yet started applying for jobs. A friend and former colleague informed me about an upcoming maternity cover position in her team at MOMA. I read the job description, found it very interesting, and applied for the position. It was appealing to me to become part of a department like MOMA, where diagnostics and research are so closely connected. Although I was eager to step into a working environment with more predefined and systematic work tasks (in comparison to

a PhD, which involves complete self-management and a “figure-it-out-as-you-go” work mode), it was also reassuring to know that there was still the possibility to take on re-search-related assignments. In addition, the opportunity to work in a clinical setting and in close collaboration with medical doctors and oncologists was very appealing to me, as was the chance to use my expertise to help very sick patients.

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

I did not have any prior employment other than my PhD position at the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics, Aarhus University.

How did you find your first job/current job?

By recommendation from a friend and former colleague.

Education

2021: PhD in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

2016: MSc in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

Jobs

2022-present: Clinical Academic at MOMA, Aarhus University Hospital

2017-2021: PhD in Molecular Biology, Aarhus University

2016: Scientific Assistant, Aarhus University

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

My friend and former colleague who told me about the upcoming position was already employed at MOMA.

Describe a typical day/week?

A typical week for me primarily includes analyzing NGS data from whole-genome or exome sequencing of tumor biopsies, in close collaboration with our bioinformaticians, who develop and maintain our various bioinformatic pipelines. These pipelines are designed to identify tumor-specific genetic variations in DNA and RNA from cancer cells. As a clinical academic, my role is to verify the presence of these variations (single-nucleotide variants, copy-number alterations, structural variants, etc.) in the data and to interpret their functional impact and disease-causing potential. Based on my clinical report describing the identified tumor-specific variations, the oncologist assesses whether any targetable variants are present that may allow referral of the patient to an experimental treatment program (clinical trial) at one of the university hospitals in Denmark. All patients are discussed at a national molecular tumor board once a week, in which I also participate. In addition, I attend various meetings during a typical week and engage in close communication with our medical laboratory technicians regarding the handling of incoming patient samples. At times, I also take part in validating new pipelines, software, or laboratory equipment. We are six clinical academics performing somatic variant interpretation and generating clinical reports. We are giving each other competent feedback daily on how to interpret the data, which is very motivating. I also have my own areas of responsibility, such as administering our participation in quality

assurance programs, facilitating a somatic variant interpretation network, and conducting a research project with an external collaborator.

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

When I work on clinical reports for our patients, it always requires my critical thinking and a strong analytical approach, which I developed during my PhD studies, to identify the information needed to evaluate the pathogenicity of a somatic variant. This often involves reading numerous scientific papers and gathering information from different databases to write a concise description in the clinical report. During my PhD I worked primarily with RNA analysis and acquired some experience with analyzing RNA-sequencing data. This gave me an advantage during my training months, when I was learning how to look at and interpret our sequencing data. I also often use my specific knowledge on RNA and its related processes such as splicing, transcription and translation to assess the effect of a somatic variant.

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

I have developed skills in the interpretation of cancer-specific genetic variants, and, more generally, I have gained extensive knowledge in cancer biology and disease. Since we also conduct various sequencing techniques (short-read vs. long-read, spatial transcriptomics, etc.) at MOMA, I have already broadened my knowledge in this field. I also see great opportunities to acquire new scientific skills in the future, such as analyzing data from long-read sequencing.

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

Since my current position involves working with cancer patients, it would have been beneficial for me to have had more knowledge of cancer biology and to have studied molecular biology in a more clinical context than I did during my PhD, which was largely focused on basic research. I also would have liked to go abroad during my PhD to work in a different laboratory and try new methods, as well as to collaborate more with researchers from other fields, in order to gain a broader perspective on the applicability of molecular biology and its techniques.

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

I assumed that I would start looking for postdoc positions at the university once I had finished my PhD, as I wanted to broaden my technical laboratory skills and perhaps change my research field from RNA biology to something else, thereby expanding my expertise. In reality, however, I only started considering this near the end of my maternity leave and applied for my current position.

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

Make sure to use your network and all the available resources within career counselling at the university or through the unemployment fund or union. Be patient if possible.



Wanjun Lin,

Research Fellow at the Center of Functionally Integrative Neuroscience (CFIN) at Aarhus University

By Simon Arvin

Education

2022: DPhil in Psychiatry, University of Oxford
2014: MSc. in Cognitive Neuroscience, Beijing Normal University

Jobs

2024-present: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Aarhus University
2022-2024: Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University College London
2020-2022: Research Assistant, University College London
2014-2017: Research Assistant, Beijing Normal University

What kind of position do you have today?

I am currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Center of Functionally Integrative Neuroscience (CFIN) at Aarhus University. My work focuses on the dopaminergic basis of risky behaviour in the human brain, combining multimodal methods such as electrochemical and electrophysiological recordings, and deep brain stimulation (DBS) in neurosurgical patients.

Why did you choose this direction?

Throughout my academic journey, I aim to investigate neural mechanisms of neuropsychiatric disorders and contribute to evidence-based treatments. I have been intrigued by the possibility of DBS in treating psychiatric disorders, as DBS allows a direct application of our neuroscience funding in these disorders. I'm also motivated by a desire to understand how neuromodulators,

main targets of neuropsychiatric medications, shape decision-making, mood, and behavioural biases. That's why I joined the lab I am working in.

Have you had other jobs prior to your current role, and how did they lead here?

Before joining Aarhus University, I worked for several years at University College London, first as a Research Assistant and later as a Postdoctoral Fellow. Those years were formative: I learned to design behavioral tasks, analyse neuroimaging data, and work in clinical environments. My earliest research role at Beijing Normal University introduced me to cognitive neuroscience and gave me hands-on experience with human experimental work. Each step gradually narrowed my focus toward affective neuroscience, neuromodulation, and decision-making.

How did you find your current job?

I learned about the position through academic networks and targeted searches within computational and clinical neuroscience groups in Europe. The project at Aarhus matched my interests perfectly and offered access to unique intraoperative datasets that are difficult to obtain elsewhere.

What contacts did you have before you started?

I contacted the lab's PI directly before I joined. Describe a typical week. My weeks alternate between data collection, analysis, and writing. Some days are spent in the operating theatre supporting intraoperative recordings from patients undergoing surgery to implant DBS devices. Other days are focused on computational modelling, statistical analysis, or preparing manuscripts and grant reports. I also supervise students and participate in lab meetings, and journal clubs.

What skills from your PhD do you use most today?

Quantitative data analysis, critical scientific thinking, and the ability to learn new technical methods quickly. My PhD also trained me to communicate complex ideas clearly, both in manuscripts and in interdisciplinary teams.

What skills did you develop only after the PhD?

Project management, clinical coordination, and navigating ethical and logistical aspects of patient-based research. I've also strengthened my ability to supervise and mentor junior researchers.

What would you have done differently in your PhD?

I would like to improve my time management so that I could finish

publishing all the studies before I completed the PhD and started a new position.

How early did you start thinking about your next step?

I always have a long-term overarching goal in my mind. Then I would plan it out in different time scales. I would try to achieve the subgoals before a major changing point, like a new position or applying for a grant.

What career advice would you give new PhDs?

Be proactive in building skills beyond your core methodology. Cultivate a network, stay open to interdisciplinary opportunities, and focus on developing independent ideas. These are crucial for navigating both academic and non-academic careers.



Anders Laustsen,

Clinical Academic at the Department of Blood Bank and Immunology and Center for Gene- and Cell Therapy, Aarhus University Hospital

By Simon Bøje Fammé

Education

2017: PhD in Biomedicine, Aarhus University
2013: MSc in Molecular Medicine, Aarhus University

Jobs

2025- present: Clinical Academic at Blood Bank and Immunology and Center for Gene- and Cell Therapy, Aarhus University Hospital
2024-2025: Principal Scientist at UNIKUM Therapeutics
2018-2024: Senior Scientist at UNIKUM Therapeutics
2017-2019: Postdoc at Biomedicine, Aarhus University

What kind of position do you have today?

I am currently employed as a Clinical Academic at the Department of Blood Bank and Immunology and Center for Gene- and Cell Therapy, Aarhus University Hospital.

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

I have always found immunology, gene editing and cell therapy intriguing, primarily because they represent the forefront of precision medicine. So, one thing sort of led to the other.

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

I was a Post doc at the department of Biomedicine from 2017-2019. During this time I was involved in various projects focusing on gene editing of cells and immune therapy, which led to the foundation UNIKUM Therapeutics, a biotech company pioneering

in using a specific type of immune cell (plasmacytoid dendritic cells) as a cell-based immune therapy. I was a co-founder of the company and worked as a Senior Scientist and later Principal Scientist from 2018-2025. During my time in UNIKUM, I led multiple R&D projects focusing on transitioning initial academic findings into a clinical product. After UNIKUM Therapeutics, I was fortunate to be able to continue with translating precision medicine into the clinic.

How did you find your first job/current job?

LinkedIn and my network

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

I did have a few established connections at Center for Gene- and Cell Therapy before I started, including a few former colleagues from my time as a Post doc.

Describe a typical day/week?

My typical week is split between two complementary areas: clinical diagnostics and translational cell therapy development; At the Blood Bank and Immunology, a significant portion of my time is dedicated to providing a precision diagnostics service. This involves variant analysis of Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS) data from patients, specifically searching for and interpreting genetic variants linked to primary immune deficiencies (PIDs). I also contribute to setting up and analyzing various immunological assays to validate these genetic findings. Overall, this helps establishing a confirmed diagnosis and directly informing effective treatment strategies for the patients with complex immune system disorders.

Concurrently, at the Center for Gene and Cell Therapy, I am involved in multiple translational projects focused on establishing new cell therapies at Aarhus University, including gene correction of hematopoietic stem cells and the development of CAR T-cells for cancer immunotherapy. Currently, a typical week heavily involves desk work necessary for moving these therapies toward clinical application. This includes identifying and qualifying the correct cGMP-grade reagents and specialized materials, and securing the necessary regulatory approvals to ensure compliance and advance our initial academic findings into viable clinical products.

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

There are multiple transferable skills as well as technical expertise that I have gained during my PhD and Post doc, which are essential for managing my dual role today, including general knowledge within the field of gene

therapy, immunology and cell therapies. Some of greatest benefits of my PhD studies were developing general autonomous discipline, including critical thinking- and project management skills, which complements well with my current roles.

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

The skills I developed significantly post-PhD primarily involve transitioning from autonomous research to commercial execution, where I was able to hone my previous technical and analytical skills while mastering stakeholder management, taking the lead of complex projects from inception to completion, and effectively learning to collaborate with cross-functional teams.

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

At the later stages of my PhD.

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

My key advice is to be proactive and strategic; your network matters more than you know. If you have the opportunity (and the interest), undertake a Postdoc in a different field of research specifically chosen because its required skills align directly with job postings in your desired area.



Mia Beck Lichtenstein,

Professor, University of Southern Denmark

*By Trine Theresa Holmberg
Sainte-Marie*

Early Career and First Position Post-PhD

Mia's entry into her first post-PhD role was, in many ways, a continuation rather than a departure. She had been granted study leave from Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to complete her PhD, and when she finished, she returned to the same clinical department. Shortly after, she transitioned into a combined position, consisting of 50% clinical work, 40% postdoc, and 10% employment at the Department of Psychology. Her PhD, which focused on training dependence, naturally aligned with this setup and reflected what she described as the "classic tripartition" of a hospital-based research career.

Existing Contacts and the Creation of a Combined Role

Because she was returning to her previous workplace, the foundational relationships were already in place.

Management had supported her PhD application from the beginning. However, the combined position she eventually entered was not something that existed, it had to be created. She emphasized that several key figures, including the former research director, helped establish the formal division. Yet much of the work fell to her: knocking on doors, initiating conversations, and asking whether such a position could be made possible. A recurring theme was the need to advocate for oneself. She noted that proactive engagement enabled a very rapid progression from postdoc to associate professor: "If you do the active work, you can accelerate quickly." Financially, the structure made sense only because the position could be split across units, typically 20% university, 40% research, and 40% clinic. Importantly, only her PhD had external funding; all subsequent components had to be supported internally.

Education

2013: PhD about exercise addiction and eating disorders, University of Southern Denmark

2009: Licensed/Authorized Psychologist

2005: MSc in Psychology, University of Copenhagen

1999: BSc in Sport and Health, University of Southern Denmark

Jobs

2024 – Present: Professor/psykolog
Børne- og Ungdomspsykiatri Syddanmark,
Psykiatrien i RSD

Feb 2024 – Present: Psykolog, Self-employed
in www.mialic.dk

2023 – Present: Professor, Institut for Psykologi,
Syddansk Universitet

2022-2023: Professor, Klinisk Institut SDU

2018 – 2023: Forskningsleder, psykolog
Psykiatrien i Region Syddanmark, SDU

Meanwhile, she often wrote applications not for herself but to secure funding for others. Several temporary positions followed until she finally obtained a permanent one as a professor, something she had to explicitly ask for.

Pathway to the Current Position

While the interview didn't detail every intermediate job change, the underlying logic of her career progression was clear: combined roles, strategic positioning, and a sustained ability to translate clinical relevance into research activity. Each step built on the previous one, keeping her firmly anchored in the overlap between clinical psychiatry, patient-oriented research, and university collaboration.

Current Role

Today, Mia holds a joint appointment as Professor (40%) and specialist psychologist in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (60%). Within the latter, 10% is clinical work and 50% is research. This combination continues the structure that has defined most of her career: an integrative role balancing science, clinical insight, and institutional leadership.

Motivation and Direction

Her commitment to research has been consistent. She describes having always dreamed of a research career and was drawn to positions where research was explicitly possible. Beginning as a neuropsychologist, she discovered she loved the deep-dive process, the slow, careful unfolding of questions, and especially the opportunity to generate knowledge that others can use. The sense of contributing something meaningful and passing it on has been a steady motivational force.

Professional Aims After Becoming Professor

Becoming a professor did not resolve ambition so much as redirect it. She spoke about the significance of having reached the highest academic rank: now the focus shifts toward mentorship, developing new researchers, and cultivating an environment where research can thrive.

She writes fewer first-author articles herself but continues to contribute to projects and values being approached by colleagues and younger researchers. The sense of collective momentum appears central.

Skills Gained During the PhD That Matter Today

Several competencies stand out:

- Communication: speaking to journalists, presenting at conferences, and building confidence through these experiences.
- Statistics and methodological depth: she shared an office with a statistician during the PhD, which became a significant informal apprenticeship in mathematics and analytic thinking.
- Resilience: exposure to the realities of academic work, rejections of articles, grant applications, and projects helped normalize setbacks and develop robustness.

Skills Developed Only After the PhD

Mia highlighted domains she believes were underemphasized during her PhD:

- systematic article writing
- conducting systematic reviews
- international experience
- advanced English language training

She reflected that hospital environments may place less emphasis on these academic traditions

compared to university-based PhD programs.

What She Would Have Done Differently

With the benefit of hindsight, she would have prioritized:

- a formal international research stay
- English-language development
- writing a protocol article
- completing a systematic review

She also mentioned that she would have benefited from more engaged co-supervisors; finding suitable supervision had been challenging since the topic was very new. Still, she noted that she finished early and described her PhD as three very good years.

Career Planning During the PhD

She began thinking seriously about her next step around the midpoint of her PhD. This included reaching out to potential collaborators, considering project ideas, and exploring funding options. Remaining in the research environment was always the intended path.

Advice for Future or Finishing PhD Students

Her advice is practical and unambiguous:

- Start early/midway through your PhD if you want to continue in research.
- Understand where the money comes from, funding dictates possibilities.
- Once you step out of research, coming back is difficult.
- Cultivate a strong network.
- Dare to reach out, ask questions, and present your ideas.
- Let your enthusiasm and energy be visible:

“I have this fantastic idea, shouldn't we figure this out together?”

This combination of proactive engagement, relational openness, and strategic timing appears to be the core of her success.



Per Kallestrup,

Professor at Aarhus University and Research Director at the Research Unit for General Practice (FEAP)

By Ulrik Bak Kirk

What kind of position do you have today?

I am currently Professor of Family Medicine and Global Health at Aarhus University and Research Director at the Research Unit for General Practice. My role spans academic leadership, research strategy, staff development, policy engagement, and the cultivation of national and international partnerships. A central part of my work is shaping the research agenda for general practice and primary care, an area that represents the foundational layer of most healthcare systems but is often overlooked in public debate. The close, everyday encounters between patients and practitioners are where illness, life circumstances, and social conditions meet. Ensuring that research strengthens this proximity is essential.

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

From early in my medical training, I was fascinated by

how individual health is closely tied to community structures, social determinants, and the lived realities of people's everyday lives. The clinical complexity and diversity of general practice was compelling to me. This perspective drew me toward primary care and later global health, where such complexities are even more pronounced. Over time, my motivation shifted from primarily understanding these challenges to building research environments capable of addressing them. I became committed to bridging clinical experience with academic inquiry and to creating structures that allow researchers to engage with real-world problems in thoughtful, rigorous, and impactful ways.

How did you find your current job?

My path to my present role was not the result of a single decision or application but rather an organic progression shaped by engagement,

Education

2005: PhD in Schistosomiasis and HIV in rural Zimbabwe, University of Copenhagen
1994: MD, Aarhus University

Jobs

2020 - present: Professor of Family Medicine and Global Health at Aarhus University

2019 - present: Research Director, Research Unit for General Practice, Aarhus

2017 - present: President, Danish NCD Alliance

2011- 2019: Assoc. Professor, Director of 'Center for Global Health at Aarhus University' (GloHAU)

2007 - present: Partner in Skødstrup Lægepraksis

curiosity, and commitment to try to change and improve conditions. When I moved to Zimbabwe with my family after finalising my medical specialisation, I sought ways to apply my skills in this environment and created a possibility to do my PhD related to the devastating HIV epidemic in the region. Over the following years working on a very disease-specific 'vertical' project on HIV- and schistosomiasis co-infection, it became obvious to me that although Zimbabwe's health system was challenged by high incidence of infectious diseases, there was an even higher need for more basic 'horizontal' healthcare information, treatment and management. This realisation made me propose the establishment of a Research Unit for Global Health at AU (GloHAU) to focus on 'diagonal' models of health care systems strengthening.

Alongside this academic quest, I continued my work as a General Practitioner in a large partnership practice and was also engaged in developing Danish General Practice through involvement in the Danish Society of General Practitioners. In parallel, I was able to nurture clinical and academic growth and gradually, I took on more responsibility: leading research projects, mentoring colleagues, building international collaborations, and coordinating interdisciplinary initiatives.

When the position as Research Director for the Research Unit for General Practice in Aarhus was announced, GP colleagues urged me to apply, and I took up this position in February 2019. In many ways, my job grew out of a continued curiosity, restlessness and eagerness to get involved rather than through a formal career plan.

What contacts did you have at the university before you started?

Through the establishment of GloHAU, I had developed a professional network within the Department of Public Health and through my continued clinical work in General Practice as well as organisational involvement in the Danish College of General Practitioners, I knew senior researchers, junior colleagues, administrative staff, as well as collaborators from previous projects. These relationships were essential in shaping my understanding of primary care research and helped me appreciate the importance of support, learning, and ambition. Simultaneously, international collaborations also played a significant role. Through partnerships in global health and primary care research, I became part of wider academic communities that enriched my perspectives and inspired new ways of thinking. These networks provided the foundation for projects and helped me understand how strong institutions are built on trust, openness, and long-term engagement.

Describe a typical day/week.

A typical week is diverse and dynamic. Much of my time is devoted to meetings with research groups, PhD students, and postdocs, where I offer supervision, discuss project development, and help refine scientific questions. Supporting researchers at different career stages is a large and rewarding part of my work. I also coordinate interdisciplinary and international research collaborations, ensuring they remain aligned with our strategic priorities and societal needs. Developing new initiatives, securing funding, and building partnerships with ministries, NGOs, and international institutions are important aspects of the job. Despite a busy schedule, I prioritise time for reading, writing, and reflection. These activities are essential for maintaining academic depth, even if they

sometimes take place early in the morning, late in the evening, or during travel.

What skills and experience from your PhD study do you have the most benefit of today?

My PhD equipped me with the foundational skills of scientific inquiry: formulating researchable questions, conducting rigorous analysis, and communicating findings with clarity. It taught me perseverance and critical thinking, qualities indispensable in leadership. Conducting my own PhD as a large community-based, yet clinical and disease-specific RCT, and in an under-resourced health system in a culture different from my own, was particularly inspiring. It made me realise the importance of cultural competence and a 'diagonal approach'. Equally important, my PhD deepened my understanding of the values that define primary care: holistic thinking, patient-centredness, continuity, and the appreciation of everyday complexity. These values continue to shape my approach to research leadership and inform how I prioritise projects and collaborations.

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

Leadership skills were developed through experience rather than through formal training. I also had to learn strategic competencies: shaping research agendas, navigating complex organisational landscapes, and transforming ideas into sustainable structures. Understanding how to build inspiring environments where people feel valued, safe, and motivated is something that grows slowly through practice, observation, and reflection.

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

I did not have a clear career plan during or immediately after my PhD. Instead, I followed what felt meaningful and energising. Opportunities appeared because I was curious, committed, and willing to take responsibility.

What specific career advice would you like to share with someone who is just about to finish a PhD study?

Let purpose and passion guide your choices. Seek mentors who challenge and support you. Cultivate collaboration and generosity, because research thrives on relationships. Develop leadership skills early, especially listening, navigating complexity, and building trust. Stay open to opportunities outside your immediate plans and aim to create long-term value rather than short-term outputs. Say yes and give it all doing your very best – this is also the most fun.