



University
of Glasgow

Kennedy, P G E (1982) *Personal view*. British Medical Journal, 285 (6344).
p. 805. ISSN 0959-535X

Copyright © 1982 BMJ Publishing Group

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or
study, without prior permission or charge

Content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any
format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright
holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/95812/>

Deposited on: 6 August 2014

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

Personal View

Many junior doctors who intend to specialise in some branch of hospital medicine undertake at some stage a period of research lasting for one to two years. Indeed, in some specialties, such as neurology, this research period is virtually a *sine qua non*. Though some choose to spend this time in a purely clinical environment, others venture into the laboratory, either in a university or a hospital setting. Since a large number of these doctors have had little or no basic training in research methods, this type of work may be traumatic and non-productive, which is potentially disastrous for their careers. Since I have recently completed a two-year period of research work in a university unit, I thought it might be helpful to give some hints as to how such a period might be made less traumatic and more productive. These suggestions are based entirely on my own experience, but I hope that some of those intending to work for a research degree may find them useful.

* * *

(1) Choose your research unit and supervisor carefully. You obviously want to work in a unit of some repute, and it would be difficult to overemphasise the importance of working under someone who understands your special needs and problems. I have found that scientists who are also medical graduates often prove to be excellent advisors or supervisors.

(2) Choose your subject of research also with care. Discuss the project with your future supervisor well before the starting date. Make absolutely sure that the work is likely to provide the basis for a research degree (MD, MS, PHD, etc) since this is what you want at the end of it.

(3) Give much thought to selecting your grant-awarding body. Sometimes funds already exist and you merely slot into an existing position. But this is not usually the case, and you should discuss potential sponsors with your adviser well in advance. Make sure that your pay is in the appropriate NHS grade and that you include in your grant application London weighting, if relevant, as well as National Insurance and superannuation payments (employee's and employer's). You have to be prepared to live at a reduced standard of living temporarily, and there is no doubt that the lack of UMTs hurts badly.

(4) Once you have started the work do not be afraid to ask even simple questions of your new colleagues. I have found that

it is far better to admit total ignorance than to wreck valuable equipment.

(5) When performing experiments for the first time, always do what was done successfully before. Do not modify old methods until you have mastered them.

(6) Be mentally prepared to have no decent results for the first three to five months (or more). This is common in any kind of research and you must not get unduly depressed.

(7) Always have the subject of your thesis at the back of your mind. Discuss with your adviser or supervisor which diversions are likely to be integrated into the main theme.

(8) In general, try not to refuse offers to collaborate. Though such work with, perhaps, members of another unit may be ancillary to your main theme, it may lead to "bread and butter" papers which can be used to support your thesis and expand your curriculum vitae. Moreover, such joint work may be valuable and enjoyable.

(9) Work hard by all means, but take the occasional break, and do not be afraid to spend several days away from the laboratory, either at home or in the library (or on the beach) to rethink your strategies. Though such lapses may offend your concept of the medical work ethic, they invariably prove to be productive in the long run.

(10) Do at least one hospital outpatient session per week. This keeps your hand in clinical practice and stops you going completely mad.

(11) Assuming all goes well, do not delay the writing up of the thesis for too long. As soon as you are back in clinical work there will be little time for writing.

(12) Finally, it should be mentioned just how well many medics do in laboratory work, even without a formal training. Though the financial burden of such a research period may be considerable, it can otherwise be recommended as well worth the time spent, both in terms of intellectual enjoyment and investment for a future career.

London

P G E KENNEDY
Neurological registrar