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What was your “ah-ha” moment when you knew sleep medicine was for you? / How did you get into sleep medicine?

My career in sleep medicine has been a journey of serendipitous occurrences. When I was a junior at Swarthmore College, I happened to take two courses that put me on a trajectory toward a career in sleep medicine. Both classes emphasized the importance of evaluating the primary scientific literature, and at that time, key discoveries were published related to the role of orexin in narcolepsy and the molecular underpinnings of the circadian clock. When I got to medical school, and learned there was an interdisciplinary field where I could study and treat sleep and circadian disorders, I knew it was where I needed to point my intellectual and career compass. I am forever glad that I did.

What is the best part of practicing sleep?

There are two groups of persons that make practicing sleep medicine so deeply rewarding to me. The first are my colleagues. I relish the opportunity to learn from other disciplines and have meaningful dialogue across different fields of medicine. It is a testament to the field that care providers from different backgrounds can learn from one another to advance clinical care and research. The second is the patients and their families who entrust their care to me. Improving the lives of people suffering from sleep disorders is an incredibly rewarding experience. Helping people live better, more vital lives, in turn, gives meaning to my life. Everyone sleeps, and helping someone sleep better is also a way that I can give back to the world, by helping spread the peacefulness that comes with a restorative night of sleep, as we all journey on this blue boat home.

What's been your favorite or most memorable moment of your career journey so far?

It was very meaningful for me to be invited to give a talk for the William C. Dement Seminar Series at Stanford. While I have given other such academic talks before, being able to meet again with colleagues at other institutions in person after the pandemic took that gift from us was very moving to me on a personal level. It was also an incredible honor to participate in a seminar series created to honor one of the founding figures of sleep and circadian research. While I never had the opportunity to personally meet Dr. Dement, I felt a connection to his legacy and the broader field of sleep and circadian science.

What has been the most enjoyable experience as a member of AASM?

It has been an honor and a privilege to work to help the AASM develop and implement the Advancing Innovation in Residency Education (AIRE) pilot models of fellowship training. I have gained a deeper appreciation for the complexities of graduate medical education in sleep medicine as well as its history. I have also made wonderful new friends from other institutions who are committed to training our next generation of providers. Making it particularly enjoyable has been working with my former program director, bringing things full circle for me.

If you could offer one piece of advice to someone who wants to get into the sleep field, what would it be and why?

Don't ever be afraid to reach out to someone you might not know as you move forward in your career. Sleep medicine is a small field and people know one another. I have found it is nearly universal that those of us who are committed to the field want our early career physicians and researchers to succeed. There are dedicated, caring people who want to help you achieve great things in sleep, but to access this network requires that you put yourself out there and sometimes make first contact with someone you don't know.

List three hashtags that describe you

#BeyondSleepy, #hypersomnia, #thankful