

“Lessons from Jatin Vyas, MD, PhD, Director of the Massachusetts General Hospital Internal Medicine Residency Program”: UConn MD/PhD Speaker Discusses Physician-Scientist Residency Training, Research Tracks, and Importance of Mentors

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Medical and graduate school training, like that provided by the UConn MD/PhD Program, is the first step of many in the path to becoming a physician-scientist. Residency and fellowship training follows, and the choice of both specialty and residency program are critical choices in the career of every aspiring physician-scientist. Making these choices can be challenging, and the UConn MD/PhD program recently invited Jatin Vyas, MD, PhD, the 10th Director of the Massachusetts General Hospital Internal Medicine Residency Program, to speak to UConn trainees about this important career transition. In meetings with MD/PhD students in the clinical years, UConn education leaders, and in a lecture to the MD/PhD program, Dr. Vyas discussed what he considered one of the most important considerations at this stage, mentors choice, and the options available to physician-scientist trainees, including specialized research tracks available in some residency and fellowship training programs.

During his day at UConn Health, Dr. Vyas toured the new University Tower and met with several faculty who oversee the clinical medical curriculum and mentor medical students in the clinical years. Dr. Vyas shared his thoughts on research tracks, sometimes termed physician-scientist training programs (PSTPs), programs which provide an accelerated clinical training schedule that aims to incorporate significant research experiences as part of the residency and (often) fellowship training. His advice to faculty was that these tracks should be considered by any student with strong research interests, but that they are not for everyone, and that faculty advisors have an important role to play in helping students decide which path to take for their postgraduate training. His discussion continued over lunch, held with MD/PhD students in the 3rd year of medical school training who were preparing to apply for residency themselves. Dr. Vyas spoke of key features of his program’s research track, including the somewhat-unusual feature of his program that adherence to the shorter, American Board of Internal Medicine research track schedule (which substitutes a year of clinical training for a year of research) is not required.

During the lunch, and later in his address to the entire MD/PhD program, Dr. Vyas emphasized the importance of mentors and mentorship in residency and fellowship training. In his view, choice of mentor is one of the most impactful decisions a physician-scientist trainee makes. Mentors are key to the successful launch of a trainee’s career, and poor mentors can quickly turn that launch into a struggle to reach escape velocity. Further, mentors can have an even greater influence on the scientific and clinical fields trainees launch their careers in than even the field in which they received a PhD or undertook a similar significant research experience. While PhD training may be many years removed from when trainees graduate from clinical fellowship, the work trainees do in a fellowship mentor’s lab may be, and often is, the work that powers a successful NIH career development award submission. Choosing a mentor who not only does interesting work but is deeply invested in the success of those they train helped Dr. Vyas enormously in his own career. Working with giants in infectious diseases like Dr. Stephen Calderwood helped Dr. Vyas define how his own academic career would begin, and these mentors were constant sources of both encouragement and critical feedback.

Hosting speakers like Dr. Vyas is an important part of the curriculum of the UConn MD/PhD Program. These speakers enhance the formal, scheduled training of the program and provide a variety of perspectives on physician-scientist training to help UConn MD/PhD students find their way through a challenging, but endlessly exciting, career path. Watch the UConn MD/PhD calendar for future speakers!



Jatin Vyas, MD, PhD delivers his lecture on the importance of mentoring in physician-scientist training to students in the UConn MD/PhD program.