Postdoctoral mentoring philosophy - Dr. Pejman Rohani

I have been fortunate to have mentored 29 postdoctoral scholars in the past 20 or so years. These scholars have come from a diversity of locations, including Mexico, India, France, Sierra Leone, Romania, Philippines, Iran, Australia, Nepal, Portugal, UK, China and Argentina. My mentees have also had a range of research interests, with different research backgrounds and career goals. I have always been committed to ensuring my postdoctoral collaborators develop the skills to ask interesting scientific questions and design the appropriate studies to answer them. By facilitating my trainees to become outstanding and productive scientists, my aim has been to help them gain the skills and expertise necessary to achieve their long-term career aspirations.

Given the inherently interdisciplinary nature of our research, in addition to subject matter expertise (eg influenza or measles), most postdoctoral scholars need additional disciplinary training in infectious disease epidemiology, ecology, or computational methods. This generally requires a tailored program of study, focused on selected research papers and books followed up with in-person discussion and review. There is also the need to ensure all mentees gain practical skills so they can conduct rigorous and reproducible research, using state-of-the-art code and data repositories and software versioning systems. Our weekly lab meetings are often focused on tutorials for use of new technologies that improve coding habits, introduce collaboration tools or identify methods for computational optimization.

In terms of postdoctoral mentoring, my approach has been, and remains, very flexible and focused on the needs of each individual. Some mentees have needed structured, regular meetings (once or twice a week) to discuss progress and plan near-term research activities. Others have needed independence, requesting a meeting whenever one is needed.

My mentees have gone on to have a range of careers. A number have become academic leaders in their own right in institutions ranging from UNAM (Mexico City, Mexico), Harvard Medical School, Emory University, Max Planck Institute (Berlin, Germany), Queen's University (Kingston, Canada), University of New Mexico, Oxford University Clinical Research Unit (Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam), Montpellier, Indiana University, Qingdao University (Qingdao, China), Institut Pasteur (Paris, France). Others have identified the governmental research track, with positions in the Institute for Disease Modeling (Seattle), the Australian Center for Disease Preparedness, the USDA, and USGS. A couple have left to join firms in industry.

Overall, I am deeply proud of the incredible scholars whom I have had the pleasure of working with. I remain committed to continuing to train the next generation of scientists.