

First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Medical Dermatology Society for this wonderful opportunity. It was an honor to have been selected and an experience that I will carry with me always. Of course, I would also like to thank my sponsoring mentor Dr. Edward Cowen and the rest of his colleagues at the National Institutes of Health Dermatology Consult Service.

September was a beautiful time in Bethesda and my daily walk to work gave me time to think about the interesting day ahead. Each day of my four week mentorship was unique and rewarding. The majority of my time was spent in the consult service; there was also academic time including basic science journal club, dermatology grand rounds (alternating between the NIH and Walter Reed), clinical journal club, dermatopathology case review, as well as a variety of internal and visiting speakers to the NIH. Additional opportunities included attending the multidisciplinary graft versus host disease conference, attending a conference on ectodermal dysplasias, and working with Dr. John DiGiovanna in clinic as a second mentor. Furthermore, I was able to interact with a variety of dermatology attendings, researchers, clinical fellows, as well as engage other departments including hematology/oncology, infectious disease, and rheumatology.

Our weekly routine on the consult service consisted of anything but routine patients. Every day brought new cases. Patients came from all over the United States and even from all over the world. It was amazing to me that all of these people were converging in one clinical center in hopes to be diagnosed, to have their natural history followed, and to participate in clinical research studies. In addition to learning about their diseases, it was fulfilling to talk to the patients and their families face to face, hear their stories, and glean what I can to help my future patients.

Some days there were diseases that I had only read about; other days there were diseases of which I had never heard. There were diseases that had no name. Queries for information went well beyond dermatology texts and I was grateful to have access to one of the best libraries in the world (in addition to the great minds walking the halls). On the flip side, sometimes we were giving basic dermatologic care to patients being seen for a rare disease in another clinic.

As part of my elective responsibilities, I ran the NIH Dermatology Grand Rounds and presented some truly unique and intriguing cases. It was unlike any grand rounds I had ever attended, much less had the fortune to run. In attendance were several area dermatology programs in addition to various subspecialties from within the NIH. I enjoyed the discussion, the diagnostic and treatment considerations, and the interactions with other residents.

Walking home after my last day at the NIH, I reflected on my short but well-spent time. I met great physicians and providers, took care of great patients, and passed time at a great institution. This experience fortified my desire to continue to take care of complex medical dermatology patients. Whether my path will keep me in rural medicine or if I will move back to the world of academia has yet to be decided. Either way, I am grateful for this opportunity. Thank you.

Meredith Hancock (PGY4)
Marshfield, Wisconsin