

Women in Pharmacology: Role Models

Yvonne Dempsie, Lecturer in Pharmacology, Glasgow Caledonian University, interviewed by Liang Yew-Booth, currently a PhD student in the Respiratory Pharmacology group, Imperial College London.

1. Why did you choose to study pharmacology at university?

I loved biology at school and knew this was what I wanted to study at University. During the first 2 years at University we studied subjects such as physiology, pharmacology, genetics, sports science and anatomy. I found pharmacology absolutely fascinating. I loved learning about how different drugs work and also about the research which is going on to find new drugs.

2. What was your PhD project on and which aspects did you enjoy the most?

My PhD was on central regulation of appetite, under the supervision of Dr Rob Mason and Dr Sharon Cheetham at the University of Nottingham. I was very lucky that my PhD was part funded by BASF Pharma which meant I spent just over a year on placement there, which I really enjoyed. Another aspect I enjoyed was collating my data, thinking about what my results meant and planning my next set of experiments. I also got to go to Christchurch, New Zealand to present some of my findings at the International Union of Physiological Sciences conference, so that was a definite highlight of my PhD!

3. What made you specialise in cardiovascular pharmacology?

I became interested in pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH) whilst doing my PhD as some appetite suppressant drugs have been linked to development of PAH. A great post-doc position came up to study PAH in Prof Mandy MacLean's lab in the University of Glasgow just as I was writing up my PhD. I was lucky enough to get the job and have been working in cardiovascular pharmacology ever since.

4. Why did you decide to stay in academia after your PhD?

During my PhD I spent time working in both academia and industry, so I had experience of both and I knew that I enjoyed working in either an academic or an industrial setting. Therefore I would have happily taken a job in either sector. However, I was fortunate to get an exciting post-doc position and so stayed in academia.

5. What is your current position and what does the role involve?

I am currently a lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University. My job involves conducting research into the pathophysiology of pulmonary arterial hypertension, a very rare but life threatening condition which predominantly

affects females. In addition, I also teach various aspects of pharmacology to a variety of students throughout the School of Health and Life Sciences.

6. How did you reach your current position?

I've just recently taken up my first lectureship, so I'm at the start of my career as an independent scientist. As a post-doc, I was very lucky to work in large, multidisciplinary team. This meant lots of opportunities to learn different techniques, to publish and to go to conferences and present my work. It's important to take every opportunity offered to you to strengthen your CV.

7. How have you maintained a work/life balance working in academia?

Anyone who wants a career in academia has to work hard as it's so competitive. However, it's also very flexible, which makes it easier to achieve a work / life balance. I have a young daughter, so plan my day so that I can be home early enough to spend some time with her. Usually I need to make up for this by working in the evening – but it's great to have the flexibility to be able to do that.

8. Have any female pharmacologists been your inspiration or role model?

I have been very lucky to work with inspirational females throughout my career. During my PhD I worked with Dr Sharon Cheetham, a senior manager at BASF Pharma, who then went on to become co-founder and executive director of RenaSci, a pharmaceutical consultancy business. I then worked under Prof Mandy MacLean (Professor of Pulmonary Pharmacology at the University of Glasgow) for nine years. Among Mandy's many accolades, she was recently elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, has been awarded an MBE for services to Science, won the 2013 BPS AstraZeneca prize for Women in Pharmacology and was awarded a Royal Society Leverhulme Trust Senior Research Fellowship. So I think it's fair to say both Sharon and Mandy were pretty inspirational women to work for!

9. Do you have any advice for those (or any specific advice for women) starting an academic career in pharmacology?

Take every opportunity which is given to you. Go to as many conferences as you can and get your name known. For women, the BPS mentoring scheme is a great way to get help with your career. I was mentored by Dr Gillian Gray who gave me loads of career advice.