

CCR Fellows & Young Investigators Newsletter

Center for Cancer Research
Volume 19, Issue 2

Summer 2020

These are challenging times, with social unrest and a global pandemic affecting our lives. In early Spring we decided to dedicate the Summer edition of the Newsletter to the impact of the pandemic on NIH Fellows. Since then, a series of tragic events impacted our community, highlighting racial injustice that permeates all aspects of our lives. While this edition of the Newsletter focuses on the pandemic, we want to share some resources about anti-racism and inclusion to engage you in critical conversations about race and diversity in science. And while some Fellows are getting back to their physical workspace, many of us are still working from home trying to manage personal well-being, mental and physical health, relationships with people that share our space and people we care about from across the globe. In this edition we feature advice from NIH Fellows that keep juggling the multitude of life's challenges, while keeping up with scientific research and careers.... And don't forget to check out the flyers at the end of this document for all the ways you can be involved in all the exciting and enriching activities of the CCR-FYI. I hope you enjoy reading the Summer 2020 Newsletter. – Alida Palmisano (Editor-In-Chief)

(background image created with BioRender.com and picture by Kutan Ural on Unsplash.com)

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Connect with CCR-FYI



Inclusion, anti-racism, and wellness: some helpful resources

The tragic events of the past few months brought to the forefront of our conversations issues related to racial injustice that have existed for years.

Below some links and helpful resources to make sure we choose to educate ourselves by reading, engaging in critical conversations and broadening our understanding with diverse perspectives.

From the Fall 2020 edition forward, the Newsletter Team plans to include articles that outline NIH initiatives and fellows' perspectives on topics of inclusion, anti-racism and diversity in science.

In the meantime, please use the resources below as a starting point to move our scientific community forward in alignment with the NIH mission of reduce suffering and promote health for **everyone**.

- Inclusion, anti-racism, and wellness resources from OITE
https://www.training.nih.gov/2020_inclusion_anti-racism_and_wellness_resources
 - Moving from Bystander to Upstander: Take Action to Combat Harassment and Aggressions [NIH OITE Videocast] (<https://videocast.nih.gov/watch=37765>)
 - How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them [Ted Talk]
https://www.ted.com/talks/verna_myers_how_to_overcome_our_biases_walk_boldly_toward_them
 - Tech tools to make research more open and inclusive [Nature – Technology Feature]
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00216-z>

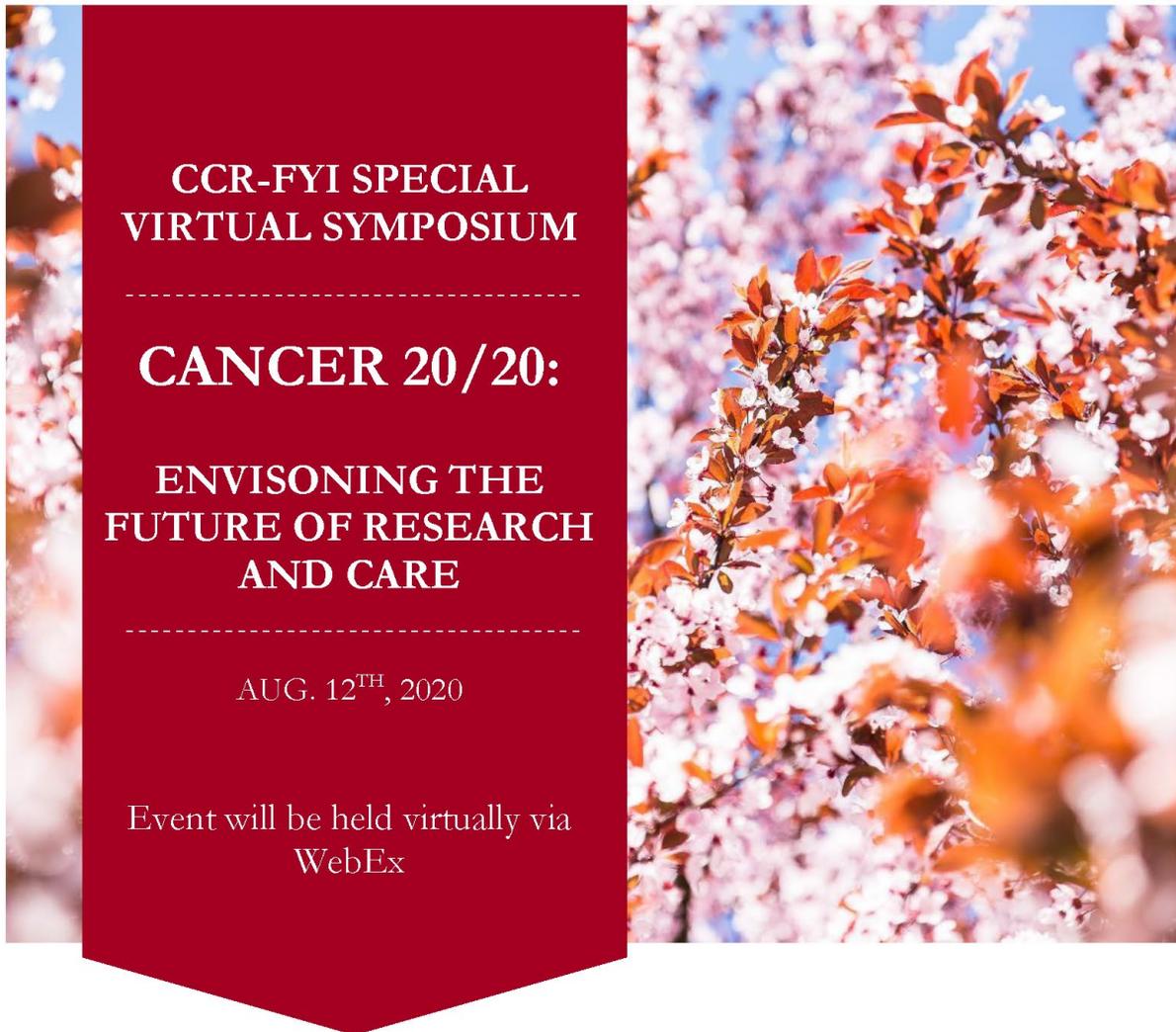
- Anti-Racist Reading List
<https://chipublib.bibliocommons.com/list/share/204842963/1357692923>

- ShutDownSTEM resources from AAAS
<https://www.shutdownstem.com/resources>
 - How does anti-Black racism show up in academia?
<https://www.shutdownstem.com/racism-in-academia>
 - Resources for Black people who are seeking healing and self-care
<https://www.shutdownstem.com/healing>
 - Resources to help deepen your understanding of anti-Black racism
<https://www.shutdownstem.com/dig-deeper>

- Resources for finding an NIH Community
https://www.training.nih.gov/you_are_not_alone

- Resources and Staff Contacts through the Center for Cancer Training website
<https://www.cancer.gov/grants-training/training>

CCR-FYI Symposium



This special CCR-FYI Symposium will feature keynote speakers, career panels and interview workshops originally scheduled for the 2020 CCR-FYI Colloquium and help fellows prepare for the next stage of their careers.

Due to NIH meeting guidelines, this symposium will be virtual.

Registration information will be released in July.

Academic and Non-academic Interview Workshops

What can DIS do for you?
Workshop

Multiple Career Panels
Scientific Careers in Government
Academic Careers
Lab to Market Training

Keynote Speakers
Dr. Oliver Bogler, CCT Director
Dr. Sabina Kaczanowski 2020
OPF Award Winner
Dr. Beverly Mock, CGS and CCR
Deputy Director
Dr. Marielle Yohe, POB

The things I have learned while homebound

by: Alida Palmisano

DISCLAIMER: This article is a lighthearted list of funny and practical things I have learned over this time at home. I am not dismissing the gravity and heavy impact of this pandemic: I personally know people who lost family members to the disease. I come from northern Italy where I have relatives that live with serious pre-existing conditions, and several of my family members in Italy are healthcare workers on the frontlines of this terrible situation...

so I ***know*** ... but...

I am also a resilient human being, with the privilege of good health and a platform to reach other fellows that may need an extra smile or piece of advice in their life. So, I hope you find here a moment of light distraction, while staying safe, cooped up at home as much as possible.

These are 10 lessons I have learned while homebound.

I miss face-to-face interactions even if I am an introvert.

- I miss the kind smile and words of care of the lady driving the NCI shuttle.
- I miss the waving goodbye to the security guy that plays trumpet with his mouth.
- I miss the shuttle driver mumbling along to classical music radio during my commute.
- I miss small talk with the cheerful cafeteria cashier.
- I miss quick catchup chats with coworkers before seminars and presentations.

IKEA names are a struggle, but the furniture is great!

All I need to create a productive work environment are a few IKEA pieces:

a magazine holder to collect my pens, agenda, and cables + a side table + a colorful pillow for my furry office mate + a comfy chair.



Many experts in "working from home" recommend creating a space that is separate from your living space. Instead of creating a full "home-office" I just moved the chair against a different wall to get a different perspective on my space, and a feeling of "when I am sitting there, I am in the office". Being able to collect all my small things in a single magazine holder was also useful to create a "commute home": during the day I would spread all my working tools on the table, and the action of collecting everything back in the magazine holder and moving that aside was enough to train my brain to think "ok, now I am done with work, let's unwind".

You need skills (and ingredients) to make ice-cream.

You can make ice cream with a can of evaporated milk and an electric mixer, but do NOT add coconut flakes if you don't want the fluffy airy mix to turn into liquid mush (still a tasty frozen treat, but horrible texture!)

Technology helps us to connect, but sometimes it may interfere with our way of communicating as humans...

I am fairly sure that the second most repeated sentence on the planet (contender of "stay safe, stay home") is "please, mute yourself, elf, elf, someone on the call is not on mute, mute, mute, mute, we hear an echo, echo, echo, echo, echo". Third place goes to "Can everybody hear me? Am I on mute?" 🙄

Staying home can be nourishing.

While I miss the interactions with people in the outside world, I don't miss the rough consequences that being outside has on my body! By staying inside for months, my skin is less irritated by sun burns, my hair is healthier because I don't have to wash away pollution and hair product worn on a daily basis, my nose/eyes feel great because I don't have to deal with spring allergies, and my hands are extra soft because of all the washing with nourishing soap. Ok, being outside has positives, but being homebound has many restorative aspects for the human body.

Build a consistent routine with tangible elements.

While I could work just in my pajamas, and I do not claim that I ever wore anything different than fluffy socks and comfy pants since March, I made it a point to get ready with business appropriate clothes from my waist up, including putting some makeup on my eyes even if I didn't have any video calls or meetings scheduled for the day. While that may not be totally necessary, the act of putting a pair of earrings on in the morning (and taking them off in the late afternoon) was a clear signal to my brain of "work mode on". Also

having a consistent morning wakeup time, and morning routine like the one I had when I would go to the office really helped create a sense of normal productivity, but the earrings were the essential component that held my working life together!

Break up the routine with fun small moments.

This seems to be in contrast with the previous advice, but I believe it is important to recognize that not everything has to happen "as before": including new aspects in our day can create special unique moments that we will be able to switch back to the "as before" state when the office workplace routine is reinstated.

Long philosophical explanation to justify the fact that I found 2 large containers of hot cocoa powder in the back of my pantry and I decided to make myself hot cocoa to enjoy a daily afternoon break :) My point is that I chose to do this simple daily activity mindfully and I will stop doing it when we go back to the office, because this was the special treat that I gifted myself to help with my mental health in a time of struggle.

Internet + Time = Knowledge + Connections

Since March, I have completed at least four Coursera courses, ten NIH online trainings, countless webinars and lectures. I also increased my network of connections on LinkedIn to pass the 500 mark! This is an unprecedented opportunity to learn and practice the "soft" skills that people always say are so important, but they don't have time to learn (like communication, negotiation, managing stress, writing). It is also a great time to learn more about any technique or

tool that is on the sideline of your current research interests, as it may be essential to boost your career advancement. Get all the certificates while you have time!

Label everything to reduce decision fatigue

I have always struggled with decision fatigue: what should I wear, what should I eat, which tea should I have today, etc. While going out would give me more choices, ironically it would also speed up the decision because I could just buy "something new" and the excitement of picking a new tea box from the store would be faster than selecting one tea bag from my shelves that contain 20+ different flavors of teas. How do I know that I have 20+ different flavors of tea? Because at the beginning of May I decided to pre-select one tea bag for each workday for the entire month and I managed to have a different flavor for every day! And now I still have access to all the same tea bags from my collection if I am not in the mood for the pre-selected one, but I don't have to make a decision every morning if I don't feel like it. And I did the same for my outfits for the entire month, because let's face it, without the weather factor or the need to match my sweater with my pants/shoes, I can preselect what shirt/top to wear for 30 days without ever repeating an outfit!!

I have a baseline for my personal needs

With the privilege of having access to shops and means, came also my complete lack of understanding of what I actually need, and how long things actually last.

If I was half way done with toothpaste, or a lip balm, I would just pick up a new one in my next grocery trip, getting excited with the new flavor and leaving the unfinished to fall behind in my cabinet, still in perfectly good condition. Now that grocery trips are rare, every time I am about to eat a cookie I think "do I really want to eat this cookie now, or am I just mindlessly snacking, and it could be better to save the cookie for later when I would actually enjoy it?". So while I am not rationing items, I am certainly more mindful of the amount of toilet paper, toothpaste, soap, lip balm or cookies I am consuming. I think this is a good reminder of two core ideas: from one side how we may take for granted that we have easy access to many consumable resources, while from the other side not all the "things" that we have access to in our consumeristic society are really an essential part of our personal baseline needs.

So these are 10 things I have learned during this extensive time homebound.

Witnessing the resilience and commitment of fellows across NCI, NIH and the entire scientific community is extremely inspiring, and if you have lessons you have learned that you want to share, please don't hesitate to contact me at alida.palmisano@nih.gov! Featuring the personal and professional successes of fellow researchers is one of the goals of the FYI Newsletter, so please reach out, and help inspire the world in these challenging times!!

A change in perspective: life from workbench to home-bench

by: Mukta Nag

Like most aspiring scientists, my brain was tuned to using my progress in the lab as a yardstick to measure my progress in life. Apart from science, travel with friends, outdoor activities and satiating my foodie desires added some zing to my otherwise nerdy life. I had come to believe that this is how my adult life was going to be, and I was quite happy with it.

And then the world as we knew it changed. The global pandemic hit us and boy! It hit us hard! Stay-at-home orders, teleworking, social distancing, 20-sec handwashing practices, masks and zoom calls became a part of our daily lives.

On a personal level, March felt like the longest month ever. My lack of productivity in lab made me feel like my life had come to a standstill. I felt lost, confused and isolated like many others dealing with the pandemic. A week into feeling like a discombobulated slug, I decided to change things around. While it was very easy to slip into the rabbit hole of COVID-associated ill-impacts, I was astonished by the sense of community and empathy gaining momentum around the world. For once, everyone on this planet was united for the same cause. We were physically apart but together. There was something very powerful about that!

It occurred to me that here was an unprecedented opportunity to revisit our long-ignored hobbies, to reconnect with old friends and family, to get crafty with our meals and

focus on self-improvement. This idea comforted me, in fact, it excited me!

In that spirit, I compiled a list of things to do to cope with “cabin fever” during coronavirus to share with my family, friends and colleagues.

Here it goes...

Fitness Programs: Endorphins... yes, please!

Gym and workout studios closed indefinitely? Thankfully most gyms, studios and independent trainers release online workout sessions every day to keep the community healthy and mentally strong during these crazy times. Working out every morning has definitely helped me stay sane in the past couple of weeks.

Here are some articles citing some of the best virtual workout classes available. These include HIIT, Yoga, Barre, kickboxing, cardio and strength training, to name a few.

- <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/fitness/a31792038/coronavirus-live-stream-workout-classes/>
- <https://www.nbcnews.com/better/lifestyle/gym-closed-here-are-some-free-or-discounted-workouts-do-ncna1159931>

You can also explore free yoga channels on YouTube such as Fightmaster Yoga, Yoga with Adriene and apps such as Down Dog and Daily Yoga Fitness to get into practicing yoga. There are free guided meditation apps such as Headspace, Calm and Mindfulness to help you manage stress better.

If you're into dancing, and you really miss those dance sessions, here's a way for you to shake a leg while being stuck at home. Here's an article listing a few dance classes you can explore in the interim: <https://www.dancemagazine.com/online-dance-classes-2645462403.html>

Cooking and Baking: There's a chef in each and every one of you :)

For a foodie like me, I was particularly psyched about amping up my cooking game. Here's a list of some amazing bakers and food bloggers:

- <https://www.bakefromscratch.com/9-baking-bloggers-follow/3/>
- <https://detailed.com/food-blogs/>

Here are some of my favorite food bloggers that cover a wide range of dishes. From quick weeknight dinners to desserts to elaborate bread baking techniques.

- <https://www.mybakingaddiction.com/>
- <https://sallysbakingaddiction.com/>
- <https://smittenkitchen.com/>
- <https://thechutneylife.com/>
- The best butterbeer recipe you can find! Recreates recipes featured in movies/shows. You can actually watch a movie and eat the food featured in the movie! How utterly cool is that? :D <https://www.bingingwithbabish.com/#top>

Entertainment: Craving some culture fix?

I was really gutted that all my travel plans and music concerts had to be put on hold. That's when I stumbled upon free Broadway, opera,

orchestra shows and virtual museum tours online. I almost yelled with joy!

- <https://www.metopera.org/>
- <https://www.playbill.com/article/15-broadway-plays-and-musicals-you-can-watch-on-stage-from-home!>
- <https://seattlesymphony.org/live>
- <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/75809/12-world-class-museums-you-can-visit-online>
- <https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>

In addition, I finally got the time to catch up on a lot of TV series that were long pending as many streaming services relaxed their subscription fees.

My personal favorite show during the pandemic was "Some Good News" by John Krasinski (Shoutout to all "The Office" fans!). The show highlighted all the good being done in the community to keep us going. Here's the link: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCOe_y6KKvS3Pdffb9q9pGug

For all the gamers and board game lovers out there, here are lists of free online games and board games you can engage in with your family and friends across the globe.

- <https://www.techradar.com/news/gaming/top-40-best-free-games-you-should-play-today-695473>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2020/mar/17/25-best-online-video-games-coronavirus-self-isolating>
- <https://www.thegamer.com/popular-board-games-play-online/>
- <https://www.boston.com/culture/entertainment/2020/03/18/board-games-online-with-friends>

I also decided to join a book club to get back into reading. A long-lost habit that I really wanted to get back into. Here are some lists of active book clubs you could join:

- <https://www.goodreads.com/group>
- <https://bookriot.com/2020/02/27/best-online-book-clubs-2020/>

These were just a few hobbies of mine that I researched. It was really endearing to see how the entertainment community had opened its arms to engage everyone in these difficult times.

Self-Improvement:

A better version of me? Why not?

There were professional and personal development courses that I had planned on taking previously but never had enough time for them. Here was an opportunity for me to expand my skillset and knowledge base. Here

are some online learning platforms where you can learn practically any technical and soft skill you desire.

- <https://www.edx.org/>
- <https://www.coursera.org/>
- <https://www.udemy.com/> (Udemy charges a fee for their courses – but they are totally worth it).
- <https://www.udacity.com/>

After I compiled this list, I realized how much there was to do and how little time I had. As I incorporated these action items in my daily planner, I felt productive and motivated again.

Suddenly my home bench seemed a lot more positive and inviting than what I had imagined. As we brave through these difficult and uncertain times, I hope that some of the items in this article can help you smoothen the transition from work bench to home bench.

Managing well-being during a pandemic

by: Katherine Polk

Living through a pandemic sure has turned everything on its head. Most of us teleworking probably find ourselves with more time on our hands than we are used to. But with all of this extra time, many of the activities we would fill that time with are unavailable, leaving us to sit in our homes. However, some of us may be doing crucial research on COVID-19 and find ourselves busier than ever, yet still having to manage the stress of living through a pandemic. I happen to find myself in the prior. Regardless of what your schedule looks like now, we are all trying to adjust to a new way of life while staying healthy. Over the last few months, I have learned a few things about prioritizing well-being and mental health during a pandemic, both from my own experiences and resources from the Office of Intramural Training and Education (OITE), that I hope to share with you. I have found successful management of well-being comes down to four things: developing resilience, practicing rest, seeking joy, and staying connected.

OITE has been putting out a lot of resources on managing stress and developing resilience specifically during a pandemic, that I have found incredibly useful. OITE uses a definition of resilience that is the ability to adapt and grow through adversity, navigate difficult challenges with awareness, intention, and skill, and to find constructive ways forward during challenging times. Resilience can be learned and developed through education, self-reflection, and practice.

One piece of advice is to divide everything going on around you into what you can control and what you cannot. Then, focus on what you can control. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic, it felt like restrictions were changing daily and focusing on those pieces of my life that I could still control was really helpful in alleviating stress. During talks on resilience ([available on their Youtube channel](#)), OITE has also mentioned human negativity bias, which is the brain's tendency to focus on, and extrapolate upon, negative events. To combat this thinking and manage stress, ask whether your thoughts are hurting or helping and notice what you can do to better control those hurting thoughts. For example, I restricted checking the news and twitter to once or every other day. Controlling your negative bias is one way to develop resilience. The world is experiencing a collective trauma and with that comes a lot of emotions. One final tip to develop resilience that OITE suggested is to practice journaling and gratitude in order to further process thoughts and feelings in this time.

Rest is a hard one for us scientists with such busy schedules, but whether you have more time on your hands or not, I think it is especially important to practice right now. By rest, I mean ceasing from work in order to relax, refresh, and recover. If you're teleworking with less to do than normal, do not force yourself to maintain the same schedule and productivity of lab life if it feels too hard for your mental health.

Productivity can also look like resting and taking care of yourself. If you are working more than usual, you probably need rest more than anything right now. In order to incorporate rest into my schedule during the pandemic, I have been setting my alarm a little later than if I had to drive to work, practicing mindfulness, and developing a growth mindset. Mindfulness can be described as the intention to pay attention to the present moment. I have found focusing on the present provides rest and escape from all that is going on. Plus, it works as a resource to manage stress and even five minutes a day can make a huge difference.

Seeking joy and play goes hand in hand with practicing rest because activities that bring joy often also feel restful. If you have extra time on your hands, pick up new hobbies. I have been baking, painting, and taking better care of my plants. For some, this is a great opportunity to finish projects that you have been putting off. For me, accomplishing big home projects can be really exciting and feels productive. I have also found going outside each day helps me feel joy and it improves my mental health compared to days I stay inside. I try to go for walks, bike rides, or even read a book outside for some relaxation. If your schedule is busier than before, how can you incorporate rest and play together? The concepts of rest and joy feel crucial to combating the pandemic and attempting to maintain well-being.

Last, but certainly not least, staying connected to my friends and family in creative ways has done a ton to help my well-being. While we have to be physically distant, we do not have to be socially distant. My friends and I have had virtual game nights, movie nights, a wine and paint night, happy hours, and even a birthday party. While Zoom and Google Hangouts are nothing like face-to-face gatherings, they are a really great way to maintain friendships while distancing. Everyone is experiencing this pandemic in different ways, but we are all going through it together and staying connected reminds us of that.

We each have a different perception and experience of this pandemic. What helps us maintain our well-being and mental health differs as well. Yet, prioritizing well-being and mental health seems more important now than ever. While reading what I have learned and what has worked for me in this time, I hope you gained some new ideas about maintaining your own well-being. I challenge you to try one new thing this week to prioritize your well-being. There is no doubt this pandemic is difficult, but together, and through sharing our collective experience, we will get through it.

Burning off the excess energy while teleworking

by: Molly D. Congdon

When 2020 started what feels like a millennium ago, we had no idea of how drastically our lives would be altered in March. As researchers at the NIH, we were looking at all the possibilities the year held: finishing experiments, publishing papers, starting graduate programs or new positions, and carrying on with our lives like normal. For some of us, normal included working in lab and frequent trips to a gym for exercise, sometimes with groups of friends. With the implementation of the telework mandates from the NIH and Stay-at-Home orders by the governors, life changed in the blink of an eye. Running around the lab conducting experiments became a desk job writing manuscripts and proposals while beloved gym workouts with friends stopped completely. If you were like me and were used to a substantial amount of movement in your day-to-day life, this change was difficult, not just mentally, but physically as well. Personally, until I established a new routine, I was insanely restless. My muscles were itching to move, but my local gym where I participated in group classes most days of the week, was closed... indefinitely. It was time to get creative with my workouts, preferably without breaking the bank buying exercise equipment. If you are still looking for ways to establish or improve your workouts at home, I have included 10 tips that I have learned over the past few weeks.

1. The internet is your oyster

We are lucky that we are experiencing this pandemic in the year 2020 (the age of the internet) where many of us have access to the internet or a wi-fi connection. If you are looking for structured at-home workouts the internet has you covered. There are thousands of free workout videos available on YouTube, as well as membership-based programs from individual trainers and companies that are accessible through websites and apps. The program options are vast: yoga, pilates, cardio, kick boxing, bodyweight training, free-weight training, dancing, etc. I strongly encourage you to check out a few different programs before committing to one or establishing your home workout schedule. Everyone has different goals, preferences and restrictions with exercise so choose the program(s) and/or instructor(s) that are best for you.

2. Remain connected and support local businesses if you can

While gyms and fitness facilities were forced to close their doors suddenly, many have begun to adapt by incorporating online classes through various platforms (Facebook, Zoom, WebEx, etc.) These classes and exercise routines may not be as strenuous as what you are used to, or would like, but they provide structure and frequently have modification for home settings. If you were a member of a fitness center, they often provide the opportunity to catch up with friends. Check

out your local fitness center to see what they are offering since operations will continue to change as we work through the recovery phases and return to a fully operational society.

I will note that these classes come with a cost that varies by business. However, if you can afford to join a center or continue your membership at your current workout facility, it is a great way to support a local business and the economy.

3. Warm-ups are essential

The warm-up is an essential part of every workout that helps loosen the muscles, gradually increase your heart rate and blood pressure, and reduce your risk of injury. Frequently, warm up activities incorporate the same or similar movements that you will be doing in the high intensity phase of the workout. It can be anything from walking, jumping rope, low exertion yoga movements or light aerobics. If you are feeling extra stiff due to a general reduction in daily movement because of teleworking, it is even more vital to warm up before the vigorous portion of the workout.

4. Cardio, use it or lose it

We all know that cardio workouts are great for heart health, increasing your lung capacity, reducing stress and improving sleep. Although a lot of people instantly think of running when they hear the word "cardio", there are numerous ways to get a good cardio workout inside. Workout videos, jogging in place, jumping jacks, jumping rope and dancing are just a few options. You can even incorporate these

activities into your chores, cleaning dance party anyone? Try different activities and see what works best for you. Start simple and build up the frequency and intensity. If you are already active, try to keep up a similar intensity to what you are used to pre-pandemic. We have all had those times when we have fallen behind on our workouts or had to regain our endurance again after an illness.

5. A weight can be any object that is heavy

Unfortunately working and working out from home means that we may not have access to traditional workout equipment. Luckily there are many ways to modify objects found around your house into weight training equipment. If you are looking for handheld weights, items such as canned food are great. The weight can be increased by placing multiple cans into reusable grocery bags. If that is not enough weight for you, grab that old fat textbook, fill empty milk jugs with water or pack a structured suitcase with clothes, books and other heavy non-breakable items. In the end, as long as your object is heavy and structured enough that the weight will not shift while you are exercising, it can be used in modified at-home workouts. If you are used to lifting large amounts of weight, you will need to think bigger... think furniture. Re-arrange your furniture around your home or lift an end of your sofa. Just be careful. Use proper form and if you had a spotter at the gym, use a spotter at home.

6. Cool-downs are a great time for reflection

I will admit that the most overlooked part of my workout routine was the cool-down. I never officially did it. Normally my cool-down process consisted of talking to friends while I walked around the gym putting equipment away after class. Once I started exercising from home, the importance of the cool-down became clear. Skipping this step caused my muscles to tighten faster and me to feel stiff the next day. After a few days waking up feeling like I was twice my age, I realized I had to establish a home workout cool-down.

Ideally, a cool-down is the counterpart to the warmup. It allows your heart rate and breathing to return to their resting state while keeping your muscles loose. For me, I ended up repeating my warm-up stretching and yoga routine with a 5-minute meditation period at the end. By adding the meditation period, I was able to center my mind and focus on my goals for the rest of the day.

7. Get outside

As the stay-at-home orders are extended and we eventually move into the various phases of reopening, summer will be here. This means warmer weather and sunshine if the weather cooperates. We all know that know that sun exposure boosts vitamin D production; however, there are other benefits including regulating melatonin production and controlling a variety of immune regulatory pathways. When you can, go for a walk, a run, or a bike ride outside. The

fresh air will help you feel less confined while teleworking. Just remember to practice social distancing regulations in place at the time.

8. Motivation is what you make it

One of the key factors to getting things done is motivation. With exercise, unless you are training for a specific event, there is no looming deadline. Instead, set a goal. This can be anything from being able to complete a specific number of repetitions of an exercise, or a fitness goal to lose inches or weight. It is your goal, so make it whatever works for you.

Besides long-term motivating goals, sometimes we need a daily motivation reminder. If it's cold, rainy, dark and depressing out, throw in a dash of teleworking and yeah, I don't really want to do much that day either. We have all been there. To combat the daily lethargy, find something that reminds you of your goals or gets your blood pumping. This could be anything from a countdown to an upcoming fitness event, visual representation of a weight loss goal, or upbeat playlist that you just can't help but move to.

9. Stick to a schedule as much as possible

No matter if you are looking to improve your fitness or just get rid of the restlessness, keep a schedule. You can use your schedule to alternate cardio and weight training and include rest days so that you don't injure yourself. As an added bonus, you will be able to keep better track of what day it is since they have all blended together!

10. Be aware of your limitations

Depending upon your ability and workout preferences, there will be limitations. Identify what the limitations are and modify as needed. If you have an injury that makes certain movements difficult, modify the exercise or start off light. Weight capacities, flexibility and increasing the difficulty will come naturally over time with persistence.

If your preferred workout style includes loud music, lots of jumping, etc. be courteous to your neighbors and/or roommates. We all have experienced THAT neighbor who annoys us to no end. Don't be that neighbor when everyone's patience is wearing thin.

Finally, be aware of your surroundings, especially when working out indoors. Furniture, light fixtures, ceiling fans, and lower ceilings are added obstacles that we don't typically have to deal with in a standard gym setting.

Personally, staying physically active, focusing on things that I can control, and keeping to-do lists have been my sanity lifelines since March. Like most, I still struggle with remembering the date and day of the week, but my restlessness has decreased. No matter how active you were before March, incorporating at home workouts are a great way to reduce stiffness and restlessness while simultaneously improving focus. Stay safe, stay active, stay fit, stay healthy. Remember, we will get through this pandemic and we will thrive in the post-pandemic world.

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Maintaining close relationships, 6 feet apart

by: Aamna Abbasi

If back in January 2019 someone told me that the next year and a half would entail getting married, moving to DC, and being quarantined at home as a result of a global pandemic, I would have told them they were crazy. But here we are: I have graduated college, got married, moved across the country, and I am now quarantined at home as a result of a global pandemic. With each event, I would take a breath and think that the chaos would end there. Spoiler alert: it did not. Quarantine for me, like for most, has been a period of adjustment - especially with maintaining my relationships.

Most people are either with loved ones (maybe less loved now) 24/7 or are isolated from them completely. I have tried to maintain some resemblance of normalcy in all my relationships. I replaced weekly hangouts with weekly facetime calls. Weekly group outings were replaced with virtual cooking parties. My friends' group chat has never been more active. For my birthday, I was able to have a zoom birthday party where I hung out with my family for a couple of hours. Even for celebrating major holidays and achievements, my friends and family resorted to virtual gift exchanges. Normal, right? My sister and I "cook" together virtually too. I am now a barista, pasta maker, and bread maker, all in one. Sometimes during virtual work with people, I would leave my facetime app on to feel like we are working side by side. I have seen countless virtual graduation

parties, drive-through engagement party celebrations, and socially distant picnics. My previous experience with long distance relationships had social isolation "easy" because I already had methods that I use to connect with those I am not physically with

For my husband and I, quarantine has been awesome, but not without an adjustment phase. After a significant time apart, we are so grateful to finally have so much time to spend together. My husband lived in California up until the day he was able to secure a transfer to his company's DC office, which luckily turned out to be the day before the shelter-in-place order. Perfect timing to enjoy DC in the spring. We went from not seeing each other to seeing only each other. The question then became, how can we best use this time confined to a tiny apartment? The answer: We got creative. We have continued to plan date nights. We would get dressed in different parts of the apartment, so we don't see each other. One of us will cook or buy dinner and we'll light a candle and voila! If I cook and make a mess in the kitchen (and I usually do), I get him to clean up after me. We also maintain healthy boundaries and ensure that we still pursue our usual independent interests. We keep our 9am-5pm working schedule to maintain progress in our job, but we also make sure to watch at least three episodes of Avatar: The Last Airbender everyday (essential to every healthy relationship).

Maintaining relationships in the time of COVID-19 is strange - it's the long-distance-friendship-with-your-friend-who-lives-two-blocks-away type of strange. Pre-COVID-19, I craved for time alone in my apartment. Now, faced without the choice to stay in or catch up with friends over dinner, I, along with many others, have become restless and reach out to friends, close ones as well as old ones that I have not spoken to in a while.

Teleworking as a fellow at NIH means keeping up with a lot of usual activities for our job, but we are also all actively trying to check in with people as a collective. Many groups I was originally a part of have increased programming to ensure we stay connected. OITE has so many daily events, I seem to have lost track. I have even signed up for countless bioinformatics seminars. I can no longer keep up with all the new content on Netflix (Even Netflix cares). The worlds' access to virtual events has expanded. Even religions have gone virtual. Places of

worship are actively working to plan check ins, classes, and masses for people to attend, all virtual. I have "gone to the mosque" from my living room couch. Community centers are engaging with attendees to allow virtual interaction among members: I have "met" new people through Instagram takeovers for my favorite center.

The coronavirus has shown how complex our priorities truly are. Balancing relationships with other important parts of our lives has always been difficult, but perhaps these dire circumstances have tipped the scales in our favor. We do more now to ensure that we are entertained, connected, and most importantly, to check in with each other to ask if we are all alright. And, yes, maintaining relationships is challenging, but with this newfound energy, I say "Challenge accepted!"

Staying Connected! Wherever you are!

by: **Shailesh Advani**

Way back before COVID-19 upended the world, my spouse and I planned a vacation to India for the spring of 2020 to celebrate our son's first birthday and introduce him to our families. We were brokenhearted when our trip was canceled but resolved to find the best way possible to give him the birthday bash he deserved. Luckily, Zoom came to our rescue. We invited our friends and family from India and the U.S. for an hour of virtual celebration with our son. We chose a time that suited most of our friends and over 50 people joined the celebration. I must say, it was a grand success. Certain truths arose as I listened to the heartwarming, multilingual conversations of my friends and family: the need to interact, to stay connected with our loved ones, and to celebrate small moments in our lives with those who are important to us.

These unusual times bring uncertainties for everyone; however, for international postdoctoral fellows, the COVID-19 pandemic has generated immense stress and unique challenges. In addition to learning to balance work and life in the new normal with everyone else, visiting scholars are dealing with visa issues, employment uncertainty, and not knowing when it will be safe to travel internationally to visit our families. Many of us are concerned for our relatives in other countries who continue to face rapidly changing situations, especially those who have no support system around to ensure they are doing well

and have necessities. Loneliness and depression can be major issues our families face. In such cases, it becomes even more critical for us to stay connected with our families back home. However, with differences in time zones and limited internet capabilities across the globe, visiting scholars must find innovative ways to stay connected to and keep track of our near and dear ones.

It remains equally important for international fellows to engage with family and friends within the U.S. Given the uncertainty around returning to our physical workplace, we should continue to interact with our colleagues through emails as well as Microsoft Teams. Keep your mentor informed of any issues or challenges! Virtually hold coffee hours or meet and greets with your lab partners!

Stay connected in any way possible!

Help your friends who are alone!

Stay Safe!

Stay Connected!

The Diversity Career Development Program in the world of the Coronavirus

by: Lorena Parlea

I was one of the fortunate applicants chosen to be part of the first cohort of the Diversity Career Development Program (DCDP), a year-long fellowship offered by the Center for Cancer Training. In the quest of giving back to the program, which helped me grow a great deal professionally, I volunteer to write a series of articles about the DCDP. [The first article](#) was a comprehensive review of the program. For [the second article](#), I spoke with DCDP alumni to find out how the program helped their careers, specifically how the program facilitated their transition to new positions. For this article, I wanted to learn directly from the current DCDP fellows and the Program Director, Dr. Ofelia Olivero.

In my first interview with Dr. Olivero, we chatted about how the fellowship was created, about the fluidity of the program, and how the curriculum is adapting to the new participants and new demands. She told me that the idea of the program began in the Diversity Task Force. They wanted to offer a program geared towards trainees from underrepresented backgrounds similar to the Sallie Rosen Kaplan fellowship for women scientists. Dr. Jonathan Wiest, the former Center for Cancer Training Director, asked Dr. Olivero to oversee this new program. Initially, Dr. Olivero created a focus group with postdoctoral fellows to find out their needs. With the help of the Office for Workforce Planning and Development (OWPD), several courses and

workshops were developed to address these needs. Additionally, a coaching component was incorporated into the program. Dr. Samantha Sutton, a professional coach with a Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering from MIT, works with the participants as a group, as well as individually. Leading participants to self-realization, she guides each person to develop their “superpowers” and mitigate their undeveloped skills. Everyone capitalizes on different aspects of the coaching, inner-reflection, self-assessment that eventually materializes into one’s holistic vision, embodied from their hopes and their dreams.

With the unusual situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, I also wanted to hear how the program has changed, shifting from in-person meetings to virtual meetups and lectures, and how the participants are coping with the changes and challenges of this unusual situation. Dr. Olivero converted the program to a virtual format in March 2020, when the majority of NIH employees started teleworking. She immediately re-oriented lectures to cater to the newly developed needs by working with OWPD to prepare workshops centered around sustaining engagement when working remotely, enlisting the help of Scott Morgan, an expert science communication speaker, to create a lecture about e-communication and giving virtual talks, and establishing a Microsoft Team account for DCDP, so the cohort could easily stay connected through

these challenging times. She also focused the energy of the group towards helping each other and helping others. Dr. Olivero warmly calls the current class “the resilient cohort” due to the vast adaptive ability of the current group. Even though the social interactions through in-person participation is lost, she ensures that the sense of belonging is re-established through virtual meetings. Surprisingly, these e-meetings consistently have the maximum attendance due to both increasing need and flexibility in the participants’ schedule.

I asked Dr. Olivero what makes the program so effective at empowering the participants and how she sustains the success of the program. She told me that she puts the needs of the trainees first, and her passion for the program and its participants is hard to hide. Dr. Olivero admits that she is quick to recognize the talents making up each participant’s personality, and to tailor the training accordingly. She believes that the program is dynamic, so she is open to adapting and implementing new ideas according to the current needs of the trainees. She gives the participants a collective voice while keeping their personal identities intact. She ensures participants maintain their sense of belonging, which tends to get lost in big institutions. She gives the trainees a space where “they can be who they are, and not what everyone else expects them to be.”. Since some of the participants are not American-born, they miss their families, their countries, and their culture - especially during this stressful pandemic situation. Dr. Olivero has created a space where it is OK to be vulnerable, and it is OK to talk about personal matters that affect your professional work.

During our talk, Dr. Olivero was eager to stress the importance of mentors and co-mentors. She actively engages them, asking for their feedback, and what they get out of this experience. “It takes a village” is one of Dr. Olivero’s favorite quotes and she refers to how much effort and how many people – from PIs, to co-mentors, to OWPD, etc. – it takes to create a community of support around the trainees.

Dr. Olivero wanted to make sure the voices of the trainees were also included in this article. After all, who better to assess the transformation of the program? So I asked the participants what they thought of the virtual format, and what helped them through this tough time: **“If you would be asked to share with your colleagues one tip, one piece of advice, or one tool, that helped you cope during these unusual times, what would that be? How did you stay focused on what matters?”** And the answers were nothing short of astounding. Some were simple, yet very effective advice; others were answers that really struck a chord with me and opened my eyes.

- I try to focus my attention on the things I can control, such as my attitude and habits.
- I’ve had a really difficult time being productive and advancing my professional development. Nevertheless, I feel better after reminding myself that I am in a really fortunate position compared to many others around this country and world. I am grateful that I am being paid, and I can safely wait out the pandemic at home. I am lucky to work with and for people who prioritize my health and the health of the community.

- One piece of advice that I would like to provide to other fellows is to create their new normal. In other words, create productive routines/schedules for your day. Also, make sure to separate work from aspects of your personal life. If possible, create your physical space only for work.
- Have something to look forward to – something always on the horizon to keep you looking ahead. It can be anything, a weekly Skype/video chat with friends, a walk, a nice meal. Something that makes you feel good, and helps you to mark the time passed, e.g. indicates that another day/week whatever has ended or started.
- I couldn't be more grateful to the DCDP program and to Ofelia for giving me the opportunity to develop my leadership skills. To answer your question, I would suggest to apply Self-Compassion (self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness). Thanks to technology we were able to efficiently transition from in-person to virtual meetings but at the same time we must not forget that we are not just taking a break to work from home, we must acknowledge that we are living a pandemic event where our loved ones, our community, and ourselves are at risk. Here is where I apply self-compassion. First, I apply mindfulness so I accept that we all are facing, the fears, stress, and anxiety from the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, I apply common humanity, it is okay to feel this way, we are not alone and everyone else is also affected. Finally, I apply

self-kindness, I try not to be harsh on myself if I am not being productive working from home. It is okay if some things are not accomplished. Having self-compassion has helped me to accept the things I cannot change but more importantly it has help me identify the things that I can change. Applying Self-Compassion combined with the various DCDP training sessions has helped me not-to-fall in or to correct bad habits when teleworking and has allowed me to devote some time to my personal grow and career development. Finally, our traditional DCDP group project has turned virtual, our DCDP 2020-cohort is being creative and actively finding various virtual opportunities to give back to our community (for instance we have committed to volunteer for the NIH Virtual Postbac Poster Day as judges) and we hope to identify and incorporate more opportunities into our group project.

It appears that even after a few years of completing the DCDP, I can still learn a lot from the program, I can still enrich my network easily by connecting with the new participants, and I can still feel I belong to a fortunate chosen few.

History of Women in Science – Nobel Laureates Part 6

by: Molly D. Congdon

Introduction

Welcome to the next edition of the *Women in Science: Nobel Laureates* series where we showcase the life, career and contributions of incredible women scientists whose research has fundamentally influenced the fields of chemistry, medicine, physiology, and physics. In this edition, we focus on Dr. Barbara McClintock, the 1983 Physiology or Medicine Nobel Laureate, “for her discovery of mobile genetic elements.”

Barbara McClintock, Ph.D.

Eleanor “Barbara” McClintock was born on June 16th, 1902, in Hartford CT. She was the third of



four children born to Thomas, a homeopathic physician, and Sandy McClintock. When she was young, her parents began calling her Barbara, believing that Eleanor was not appropriate and too delicate for the

independent child. To ease the financial burden on the young family with a budding medical practice, Barbara lived with her aunt and uncle in Brooklyn until she began school. In 1908, the entire family moved to Brooklyn, where Barbara completed her secondary education at Erasmus Hall High School and discovered her passion for science. Her desire to continue her studies upon graduation was strongly protested by her mother who feared for her daughter’s future. At the time, women frequently married after high school and those who attended college were commonly considered odd and unmarriageable. Eventually, her father allowed her to enroll at Cornell University’s College of Agriculture in Ithaca, New York.

While at Cornell, Barbara studied botany, joined the student government, and learned Jazz. Although she was invited to join a sorority, she refrained from participating. During the fall of 1921, Barbara took the only undergraduate genetics course offered at the university held by Dr. Claude B. Hutchison. At the time, genetics was still an emerging field. Mendel’s heredity principles had been discovered 21 years earlier, but some in the professional community were still reluctant to accept the concepts. Barbara was fascinated. Upon completing the course, she received a call from Dr. Hutchison personally inviting her to attend the graduate level genetics course, the only other genetics course at Cornell. Simultaneously, Barbara participated in the university’s cytology course, which focused on chromosome structure and behavior during mitosis and meiosis. Cytogenetics, the combination of these two fields, was in its infancy but would shape her scientific career for the rest of her life. Barbara earned her B.A. in agriculture in 1923 and remained at Cornell for her graduate career, earning her M.S. and Ph.D. in botany in 1925 and 1927, respectively.

After completing her Ph.D., Barbara remained at Cornell, serving as a botany instructor until 1931

and researcher until 1936. As a research associate for Dr. Rollins A. Emerson, Barbara conducted studies to correlate the 10 chromosomes found in corn with the genes they carry. She successfully developed a carmine staining methodology to visualize the morphology of corn chromosomes in microspores, cells that develop into male gametophytes and eventually sperm cells. This work enabled her to link specific chromosome groups with traits that were inherited. She was also the first person to describe the cross-shape interaction of chromosomes during meiosis in 1930. A year later with the assistance of Harriet Creighton, she observed and showed the recombination of chromosomes under a microscope, an event that had only been hypothesized. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, a scientific interest group focused on understanding the relationship between chromosomes, genes and cytogenetics was formed. In addition to Barbara McClintock, members included George W. Beadle and Marcus M. Rhoades, both who were pursuing doctorate degrees with Dr. Emerson, as well as any interested graduate students. This collaborative, supportive group influenced the direction of Barbara's research career and remained connected for years to come.

Barbara finally left Cornell in 1936 to become an assistant professor at the University of Missouri and maintained a productive research program examining the effects of X-rays on corn chromosomes and genes. She observed that the ends of broken chromosomes can locate each other and fuse together in various manners. This work led to her discovery of the "breakage-fusion-bridge" cycle in 1938. Barbara was captivated by her work. As she stated in *A Feeling*

for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock,

"I was just so interested in what I was doing I could hardly wait to get up in the morning and get at it."

"One of my friends, a geneticist, said I was a child, because only children can't wait to get up in the morning to get at what they want to do." However, as time progressed her contentment with her position decreased. Believing there was "inadequate opportunity for advancement" and support for women at universities, she began looking for her next position.

In 1941, she moved back to New York and shared Marcus Rhoades' research plot at Cold Spring Harbor. This move led to an eventual staff scientist position in the Carnegie Institution's Department of Genetics at Cold Spring Harbor. Without the teaching and funding obligations of the academic community, land to grow her corn, and reduced scrutiny towards woman scientists, Barbara was able to focus on her research and flourish. From the mid-1940s through the early 1950s, she discovered two genetic elements, which she termed "Dissociator" (Ds) and "Activator" (Ac), that possessed the ability to transpose their location on the chromosome, when both elements were present, and effect the surrounding genes. Coined "controlling elements," she believed that Ds and Ac were the answer to how complex organisms create a vast range of cell and tissue types from one set of genes. This theory contradicted the common belief that genes remained static as they were passed through the generations. Her frustration

with the scientific community's lack of interest and confidence in her theories grew. Although she still pursued her research, she stopped publishing reports of her work and theories.

“If you know you are on the right track, if you have this inner knowledge, then nobody can turn you off... no matter what they say,”

Eventually, the scientific community realized the impact of her theories on genetic control in the 1960s and 1970s. This was partly due to François Jacob and Jacques Monod's theories on genetic regulation, as well as the discovery of transposition in bacteria and viruses. The field rapidly grew. Transposition was soon discovered in more organisms: insects (*Drosophila*), parasites and retroviruses. Furthermore, it was identified in cancer, immunology, and as a method of genetic engineering. These findings led to a shift in the scientific view of genes and increased interest in Barbara's early work. "Over the years I have found that it is difficult if not impossible to bring to consciousness of another person the nature of his tacit assumptions when, by some special experiences, I have been made aware of them. This became painfully evident to me in my attempts during the 1950s to convince geneticists that the action of genes had to be and was controlled. It is now equally painful to recognize the fixity of assumptions that many persons hold on the nature of controlling elements in maize and the manners of their operation. One must await the right time for conceptual change," she wrote to fellow geneticist Dr. Oliver Nelson.

Barbara McClintock formally retired from the Carnegie Institute in 1967. She remained with Cold Spring Harbor as scientist emerita,

mentoring the next generation of scientist. Although she devoted her life to science and never married, she was not a careerist. Barbara's lifelong passion was her research. During her career, she was third elected woman to the National Academy of Sciences (1944), the first female president of the Genetics Society of America (1945), and the third woman awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (1983), as well as the recipient of numerous awards and honorary degrees. She passed away on September 2nd, 1992, leaving a legacy that shaped our modern-day understanding of genetics. As Gerald Ralph Fink stated in her obituary published in *Nature*, " [Barbara McClintock's] burning curiosity, enthusiasm, and uncompromising honesty serve as a constant reminder of what drew us all to science in the first place."

Photo credits (Barbara McClintock):

Photo source: copyright: The Nobel Foundation

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Activities of interest for FELLOWS!

- Sallie Rosen Kaplan Postdoctoral Fellowship
- National Postdoctoral Association
- FYI Activities: Join the Colloquium Planning committee, Join the Steering Committee!!



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Activities of interest for FELLOWS!

- Diversity Career Development Program
- FYI Activity: Join the Newsletter Team!!
- Mark your Calendars: National Postdoc Appreciation week! (September 21-25, 2020)
- Frederick Diversity Committee



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Events will be held on the Bethesda and Frederick Campuses

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*Take a moment for some personal enrichment while enjoying lunch. Free cookies provided!***
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Questions? Contact: Molly.Congdon@nih.gov
*Supported by the CCT Office of Training and Education.
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MISSION
To celebrate diversity, inclusion, promote productivity, work-life balance and career satisfaction.

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FDC creates avenues for trainees to engage in:

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- Career Exploration and Enrichment
- Networking
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FDC meets every 3rd Friday at 1pm

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