

Laura Stennett, Cancer Research UK



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I was looking to use my PIPs placement as an opportunity to explore career options for when I finished my PhD, and business development/technology transfer appeals as a potential non-lab based career. This placement had the additional advantage of being oncology-focused, which ties in with my PhD and is an area I would be keen to continue to work in.

I was working on a metastasis project to identify imaging modalities that could be utilised to assess anti-metastatic therapeutic response. This involved conducting Systematic Literature Reviews and patent database searches to identify any freedom to operate restrictions in this area. This work was compiled into a report and executive summary, which included critical evaluation of each modality and key recommendations as to how these imaging modalities can best be applied by CRUK to evaluate novel anti-metastatic therapies pre-clinically and clinically.

In terms of what was most challenging, I found getting to grips with the language used in patent databases challenging to start with, as I am not used to understanding legal jargon. This meant that some patents were difficult to interpret, and identifying patents that would restrict the work of CRUK was initially difficult.

I found a number of aspects of my placement rewarding. Firstly, being made to feel like a member of the team and being involved in meetings and discussions was very rewarding, as it reinforced for me that my work was worthwhile and that I had something valuable to contribute to the work the team was doing. In addition, being able to drive my project forward allowed me to develop project management skills and take ownership of my work. Having the opportunity to get involved in other aspects of the organisation, such as fundraising, was also very rewarding, as it allowed me to explore other potential career options and understand how much hard work goes into funding CRUK's lifesaving research; something which was very humbling given that my PhD research is cancer-focused.

I have gained a good understanding of business development and technology transfer, including how to critically evaluate science/projects, how to interpret patents, and how to identify and collate important, relevant, information so as to inform other team members about the feasibility of a particular technique. In addition, I have learnt about how a large charity operates, and how much hard work goes into fundraising! I have also learnt a number of softer skills, including organisational skills, communication, project management and presentation skills.

From completing the placement I have learnt that I am able to adapt to working in an office environment with business development professionals, as well as working in the lab with scientists. I have also learnt that I have more 'softer skills' than I thought I did, and that I was able to network effectively with people from across the organisation, despite struggling with networking in the past due to a lack of confidence.

This placement has confirmed that business development is a potential career option for me once I finish my PhD.

Top Tips for other PhD students?

- I would advise other students to make the most out of their placement and throw themselves in to working life at the organisation. I was able to get involved in fundraising, volunteering, the CRUK mentoring scheme and personal development opportunities whilst I was on my placement, alongside my main project, which helped me to develop lots of additional skills and get the most out of the experience.
- Talk to and get to know as many people across the organisation as possible. Not only is it a fantastic networking opportunity, but you may also come across people working in interesting, appealing jobs that you never even knew existed!