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Tell us about your current role and organisation

I currently lead a team of scientists in the Cell and Gene Therapy (CGT) unit at GSK, a science-led, global healthcare company. In CGT we are working on a number of personalised cancer medicines where we take the patients' own immune cells and modify them *ex vivo* so that they are able to attack and kill cancer cells. My team focuses on cell characterisation, so it is our job to understand the biology of the immune cells we use and how our manufacturing processes may impact their function or phenotype. We use an array of methods including flow cytometry, proteomics and RNA sequencing in order to do that. We are always looking for new technology or approaches that could expand our understanding or advance our manufacturing process. This will help to improve the medicine, reduce cost of goods and reach a greater number of patients.

How did you move from academia to your current role?

After my PhD I decided I wanted to have an adventure and looked for post doc opportunities abroad. After much research and deliberation, I ended up in Toronto which was a great place to be, both professionally and personally. Towards the end of my contract I started to look for jobs back in Europe, as by this time I had had my first child and wanted to move back to be closer to extended family. I applied for a senior scientist role at GSK, advertised on Nature jobs, and was selected for interview. Unfortunately, I wasn't successful, but the hiring manager told me that she'd like to consider me for future opportunities. I agreed but didn't give it much thought as I assumed it was just something they say to everyone. Fast forward twelve months and I was back living in the UK (after my husband was offered a job in Cambridge) and GSK reached out to ask if I was still interested as their group was expanding and they were hiring again. I attended another interview and was offered the role. The job specification was a perfect fit for my PhD project and was an exciting opportunity to apply what I had learned in academia to an industrial role.

What does a normal working day look like for you?

It's a cliché but there isn't really a normal working day. My role is varied and that is one of the things I like most about my job. My typical responsibilities include: supporting my team members, attending lab meetings to keep up to date with developments across our wider team, planning the research direction for my team, reviewing experimental write-ups, keeping up to date with scientific advances, writing scientific reports and presenting data. I also volunteer as a STEM ambassador.

What are the best things about working in your role?

- Exciting science
- Many opportunities to learn something new
- Being close to the patients
- Working alongside some great people

What are the biggest challenges you face in your work?

- Maintaining a balance between supporting existing, more mature projects as they get close to the clinic and continuing to allow enough resource for research activities that will support our platform for future projects.
- Things can change quickly in large companies and it can be hard when a project you have invested your time in is stopped.
- As I have small children at home it can be difficult to balance the two roles, but this has made me very focused and improved my time management.

What's the progression like/where do you see yourself going from here?

Career development is well supported at GSK, and we are allowed four development days per year. This could involve attending courses or conferences, spending time with a mentor or shadowing someone from another department. As it is a large company there are many career options available internally. For example, business development, regulatory affairs, operations etc. So, you may come for the science but then find something else that fits with your skills and career goals.

I hope to continue in my current role for the foreseeable future, I enjoy the work and am excited to follow the projects through until we get them into clinical trials and beyond.

What top tips would you pass on to researchers interested in this type of work?

Try to get some experience working in industry. This could be through work experience, an industrial placement, or joint project with an academic group.

Be open to taking on new challenges that may push you out of your comfort zone. We often work on matrix teams with members from many different areas of the organisation. It can be intimidating to speak up at meetings where there may be many senior people present, but by doing so you will increase your network and can learn a lot.

Be flexible. When I first started at GSK we were working on autologous therapy for rare diseases using *ex vivo* modified haematopoietic stem cells, where I had a lot of previous experience. We are now working on immune cells for cancer therapy, which was something completely new. However, there are many opportunities to learn on the job and its important not to forget existing skills and how to transfer them to new challenges. Be curious. This applies to the science but also to ways of working. Don't be afraid to ask questions and think about how things could be done better.