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*Dear postdoctoral fellows,*

In this difficult time of quarantine and working from home, the BCH PDA Public Affairs committee hopes you still feel like an important part of our community! Whether you are staying at home for eWork, taking care of kids who are suddenly without school, currently trapped abroad, or are helping their whole lab by working to complete essential animal or reagent maintenance, please don't hesitate to reach out to a coworker, a friend, or even your PDA Executive Board if you feel lonely, need help, or just need a cookie recipe. For urgent needs, use the PDA email. For chatting, join our facebook group. You are not alone!

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To submit comments, articles, or ideas for future newsletters, please contact: [Postdoc-publicaffairs@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:Postdoc-publicaffairs@childrens.harvard.edu). For more information on the postdoc association, view our website at: [www.childrenshospital.org/research/research-administration/post-doctoral-association](http://www.childrenshospital.org/research/research-administration/post-doctoral-association). Also find us on Facebook and LinkedIn!



PDA website



facebook



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**2019 Retrospective**

by the Postdoctoral Association Board Members

With the start of a new decade, we've reached the end of another eventful year for postdocs at Boston Children's Hospital. In addition to all of your accomplishments, we would like to highlight what the BCH Postdoctoral Association achieved in 2019:

- Continued support for postdocs during the rollout of **new 2019 salary guidelines following the NIH minimum standard** (negotiations to meet the Feb 2020 salary increases are ongoing)
- In September, we held **150 Years at BCH: Postdocs Past, Present, & Future**, which celebrated our current postdocs' research and featured accomplished speakers like Robert Langer, Elizabeth Engle, and Trista North as well as our Keynote Speaker, Harvey Lodish
- We received input from over 200 clinical and research postdocs in our **annual postdoc survey**; stay tuned for our full report on its findings at the [June Town Hall Meeting!](#)
- Our **Annual All-Star Mentoring Event** featured over 15 mentors, with our Best Mentor Award presented by Gus Cervini (BCH Vice President of Research). Once again, this year we launched the "Rate your mentor" survey, you were more than 100 to participate. Thanks to your vote, we awarded 2 great mentors: **Timothy Yu received the "J.F.P. Ullmann Award"** and **Lois Smith received the "BCH Postdoctoral Association award"**
- Incredible turnout for **networking and outreach events**, including our Boston Harbor Island Cruise Day, Science Carnival, December Holiday Party, as well as regular pub night, game night, and breakfast socials
- Engaging and informative **career development events**, including high-profile speakers and panelists from academia and industry, and featuring events about alternative career and funding pathways
- Over **12 travel awards** given to postdocs for conference and workshop travel, in recognition of their research accomplishments at BCH
- Rollout of our **updated website**, with information about our board, event calendar, and useful resources for BCH postdocs ranging from our newsletters to online job listings. Over 48 of your achievements were highlighted on our social medias, LinkedIn and Facebook and on our newsletter
- Ongoing meetings at the **Research Executive Council Meeting**, where we represented postdoc interests to the CSO, Department Program Chairs, and the VP of Research

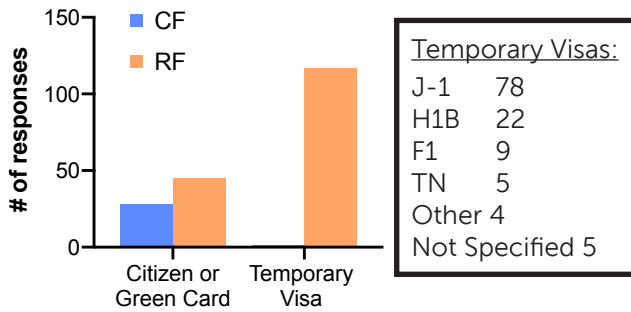
# 2019 Annual Survey Results Preview

by Ari Tabaac and Sarah Ducamp

From October through December 2019, we asked research fellows (RFs) and clinical fellows (CFs) here at Boston Children’s Hospital (BCH) about their postdoc experience. We reached over 196 unique postdocs this fall, and we **thank you all for your participation!** In this article, we will be highlighting some of the key findings from the 2019 annual survey.

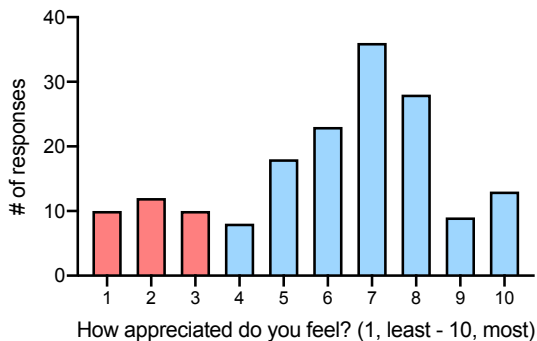
## Who responded?

Most responses this year were from RFs (n=166, 85%), while the response rate from CFs (15%) has dropped slightly from 2018 (23%). Of all 196 postdocs who responded, men (n=83, 42%) and women (n=109, 56%) were more evenly represented. Though most postdocs at BCH identified as heterosexual (n=180, 92%), 4% of postdocs reported a sexual minority identity. The average age of postdocs was 33. Regarding immigration status, most postdocs on temporary visas were RFs (and J-1 visas were most common).



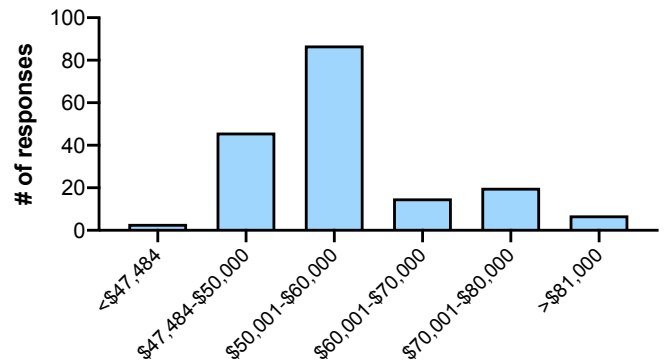
## Do postdocs feel appreciated?

Overall, most postdocs reported feeling appreciated in their position as a postdoc. However, over 30% of postdocs reported a score of 5 or lower, indicating about one-third of postdocs reported **having average to poor appreciation in their postdoctoral roles.** In our survey, postdocs felt that more active mentoring, feedback on job performance from PIs (including annual assessments, see page 4), and higher salaries were the most crucial improvements to feeling more appreciated.

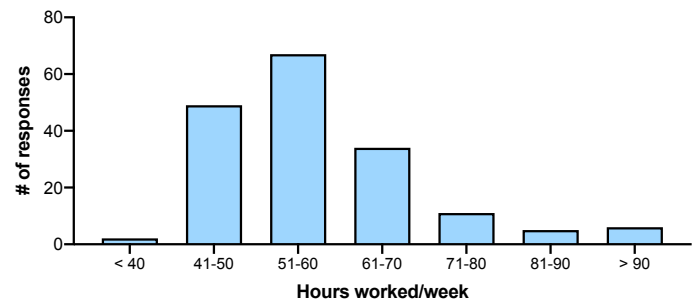


## How are postdocs paid?

Most postdocs at BCH earn between \$50,000-60,000 a year, which amounts to \$4,166/month (before taxes) for postdocs who are paid biweekly at BCH. These amounts correlate with the NIH salary minimums for 2019. We are actively working to increase the salary for all postdocs to the new 2020 values (\$52,700+, NOT-OD-20-070). **Only 35% (n=69) of postdocs** felt that their salary was sufficient in covering their living expenses.



Additionally, most postdocs work from 51-60 hours a week, with 27% of postdocs reporting 61 to 90 or more hours worked, with 53% of fellows feeling obligated to work on weekends versus 36% who do not.

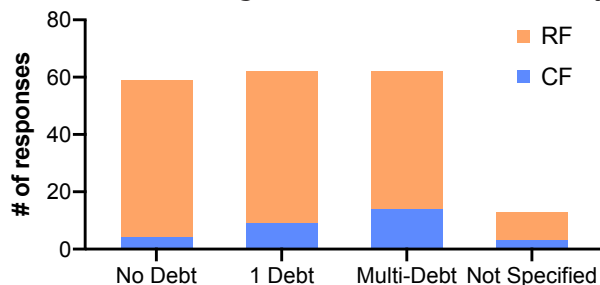


## Are salaries adequate to cover cost of living in Boston?

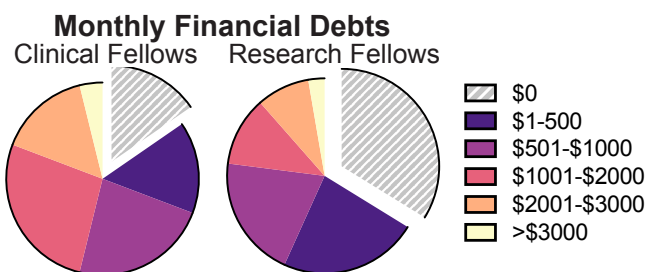
The cost of living in Boston is known to be high, and this is complicated by the realities of the postdoc workload and for certain postdocs, their visa conditions. This is especially true for single postdocs, which have to cover all costs with a single salary and represent one third of fellows in our 2019 survey. Postdocs with children (n=56, 29%) face similar challenges due to prohibitive costs of childcare in the Boston area.

In order to better assess how postdocs are faring, we included new questions to better assess the financial stress of fellows, including examining financial debts, food insecurity, and postdocs’ capability to handle unexpected emergencies.

Over 85% of our postdoc survey respondents (n=166) reported they had some type of financial debt. When breaking down these numbers by fel-

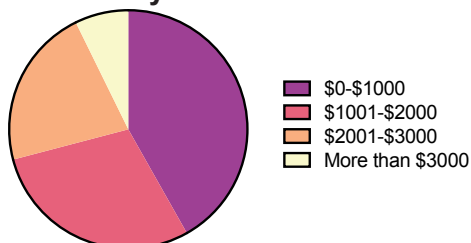


low type and number of debts, we found that over 2/3 of RFs reported having debt, with single (n=53) and multiple (n=48) debt types being equally reported. These debt types included **student loans** (n=51), **credit card payments** (n=91), **medical bills** (n=37), and **auto loans** (n=27). Notably, U.S. citizens were not the only fellows reporting student loan debt, as 35% of fellows with student loan debt also held visas.



When examining total debt amounts, these monthly bills contribute over \$2,000 in expenses for 12% of postdocs. Furthermore, although a larger proportion of RFs report no debt and more CFs have monthly debts in the \$1,000-2,000 range, over 35% of RFs report monthly debts over \$501. When these amounts are compared to the average salary reported by postdocs, this means **over 1/3 of the average postdoc's monthly income goes toward these expenses.**

### Monthly Childcare Costs



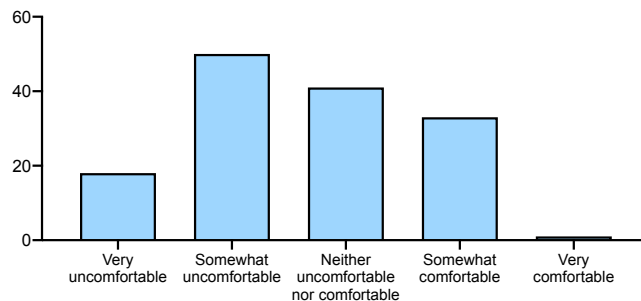
In addition to these debts, postdocs that have children (n=56, 29%) pay extra childcare costs. Over two thirds of postdocs pay at least \$1,000 per month on such expenses.

We also asked whether a postdoc felt they could cover an unexpected \$400 expense. Overall, 18% of postdocs (n=36) reported they would not be able to

handle such a cost. However, despite the number of postdocs being able to cover such a cost, most would be uncomfortable having to do so.

### Food insecurity was not rare among postdocs.

At some point during their time at BCH, 26% of post-



docs reported they worried about whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more (unrelated to COVID-19 shortages). Further, **17 postdocs (9%) reported they did run out of food and did not have money to buy more.** As access to food is a basic necessity of life, these findings have concerning implications for the quality of life of BCH postdocs.

Finally, we found that **the majority of postdocs (n=146, 74%) have postponed major life goals like getting married, having children, or moving to a new home due to their finances.** Given the average age of postdocs was 33 and length of time as a postdoc at BCH can last up to five years, many major life goals are being postponed for a significant amount of time.

### In Conclusion

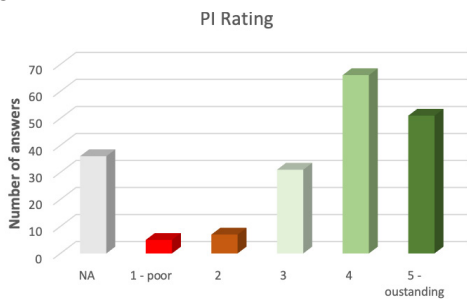
Preliminary findings from our 2019 annual survey point to postdocs being unable to make a living wage at BCH. Food insecurity, monthly debt payments, childcare costs, and the high cost of living in Boston<sup>1</sup> contribute to postdocs' financial instability and delayed life goals. As your postdoctoral association, we seek to address these issues through further advocacy at BCH. As part of this process, we are seeking anonymous quotes about your experiences with your salary and costs of living in Boston. Combined with the 2019 survey data, these stories will help us advocate for better postdoc salary and benefits at BCH. All stories will be kept anonymous; your name will not be used. If you'd like to contribute, please send a brief (2-4 sentences) description of your experiences to [postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu).

1. Cohen, S. "The most expensive places to live in America." CNBC. [www.cnbc.com/2018/06/28/these-are-americas-most-expensive-states-to-live-in-for-2018.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2018/06/28/these-are-americas-most-expensive-states-to-live-in-for-2018.html)

# How do postdocs rate their experiences in their labs?

by Sarah Ducamp

As part of our annual survey, we also asked about PI-postdoc relationships. More than half of postdocs rated overall their PI between 4 and 5 ("outstanding"). A small proportion of postdocs (6%) rated their PI closer to "poor (between 1 and 2). The PDA is particularly attentive to these poor ratings. Comments associated with these ratings included concerns over scientific integrity, extreme pressures around productivity, feelings of exclusion from the lab due to age or gender, and mistreatment from the PI and/or labmates.



First, we like to say to postdocs who have these experiences: we hear you. You should feel free to contact **any member** of the PDA board to discuss your problems. This association is YOUR association, and our primary goal is to advocate for your rights and help you to overcome the difficulties you may meet during your time at BCH. Further, the PDA board members are not your only option. At BCH, you can always contact the Office Fellowship Training officer, Lu-Ann Pozzi. You can also contact the Harvard Medical School (HMS) Ombuds Office (<https://hms.harvard.edu/departments/ombuds-office/contact-ombuds-office>). The Ombuds Office exists as an impartial entity for addressing concerns of all students and employees in the HMS system, including postdocs, including "work/learning environment and performance, fear of retaliation, professional misconduct, authorship, sexual harassment and discrimination." The following confidential line can be used to schedule an appointment with their office: **617-432-4041**.

## Did you schedule your Annual Assessment?

By Ari Tabaac and Sreya Ghosh

Since 2019, BCH policy requires every postdoc to receive an annual assessment from their PI. Recently,

BCH has created a template designed to help PIs and postdocs conduct this meeting. Find the form enclosed in our email and on our website.

Annual assessments for postdocs are beneficial in that they:

1. Clarify the mentor's and the postdoctoral fellow's expectations and concerns with each other consistently throughout the fellowship.
2. Help set scientific goals with a 6-12 month timeline that works for both the fellow and mentor.
3. Provide feedback on the postdoctoral fellow's performance, and facilitate discussion of their professional long-term goals and ambitions (both academic and non-academic).

The number of postdocs reporting that they received an annual assessment in 2019 (32%) has dropped slightly from 2018 (37%).

Don't be nervous about asking for an annual assessment from your PI – evaluations now standard policy at BCH that your PI should be following! If you have difficulties initiating discussions with your PI or scheduling an annual assessment, you can reach out to Lu-Ann Pozzi from the OFT or Melissa Brodrick from the HMS Ombudsoffice.

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*As part of the recent update to the BCH Research Fellows manual there is a special emphasis on the importance of an annual career conference meeting between the PI and the Postdoc. BCH believes these annual check-in meetings where career growth is discussed (and not lab results!) is essential to a healthy mentoring environment. BCH has created a one-page template for PIs/Postdocs to have a record of this meeting occurring, and will be active in overseeing that these meetings take place on annual schedule. This will be emphasized when we roll out the revised Fellow's manual in the spring of 2020.*

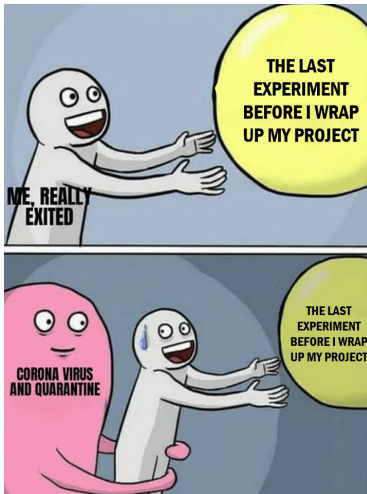
– Gus Cervini, VP of Research Administration at BCH

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In order to assess your scientific growth as a scientist, you can also prepare an Individual Development Plan (IDP, <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/>). MyIDP provides a streamlined method to plan and prepare a strategy to assess "your strengths, areas for improvement, interests, short-term and long-term goals, and requisites". The final steps of the IDP consist of implementing, reviewing your progress (preferably every 6 months to a year) and adjusting your goals accordingly. IDPs can increase communication between you and your mentor, but can also provide a means for regular evaluation for yourself, keeping you organized and on-track for your long-term ambitions as a scientist.

# Adapting research work to reduce COVID-19 risk

by Kimberly Wong



Before last week, most postdocs would argue they spend more of their day in lab than they do at home. However, in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19, the world has moved virtual: events are canceled, meetings are now virtual, restaurants and bars are closed. Last week, the BCH Research Administration asked all re-

search to shut down to limit on-site staff and prevent their risk of exposure via public transportation or in shared lab spaces. These policies are crucial in order to “flatten the curve” and minimize the number of affected patients and reduce the strain on our health care system<sup>1</sup>. **For any questions about COVID-19, call the BCH COVID-19 Hotline (617-355-4200).** Here is a summary of the new policies [set in place as of 3/23](#) and extending through 4/24 (updated info can be [found here, intranet website](#)):

## Remote Work, Pay, and Benefits

**As of 3/23, anyone working remotely will receive their regular salary and benefits, regardless of funding source or position.** Further salary decisions regarding postdoc pay is implemented differently in each division, so postdocs should reach out to their PIs or division administrators for individual assurances. If you have issues or concerns, please email us ([postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu)) or the OFT.

## Lab Closures & Building Access

Each PI identified 2-3 staff to serve as key points of contact with Research Operations ([ResearchLabSupport@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:ResearchLabSupport@childrens.harvard.edu)). This list is updated daily to allow for changes to be made immediately. **As of 3/19**, Enders, Karp, and some areas of CLS will be under weekend mode. **BCH ID badges are required for access, but no badges will be deactivated.** The [emergency pass on the back of ID badges](#) will allow essential staff to travel to work during Gov. Baker’s stay-at-home advisory.

1. “Flattening the Curve: What this means and why it matters?” CNBC, March 19, 2020. [www.cnbc.com/2020/03/19/coronavirus-what-does-flattening-the-curve-mean-and-why-it-matters.html](http://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/19/coronavirus-what-does-flattening-the-curve-mean-and-why-it-matters.html)

## Parking for Essential Employees

- Monthly parking access remains normal for BCH garages
- Off-site monthly parking can now park for no additional cost in the [BCH Patient Family Garage](#)
- Zone 4 or higher MBTA Commuter Rail monthly pass program (or Boat Pass) can now park at [333 Longwood](#) (use your ID for access)
- Zone <3, T-pass, walk, or bike commuters can park in the [Karp Family Garage](#)

## CSO Office Hours

In an effort to help everyone with the fluid situation, David Williams (CSO) and Cus Cervini (VP of Research) will be addressing the research community and answering questions **every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 12 p.m. for the next 1-2 weeks.** Look out for the emails each day with links.

## Tips for Working From Home:

WFH does not mean sleeping in or wearing pajamas all day. This is the time to finally sit and analyze the data you’ve collected, read through your “papers to read” folder, organize or start writing a paper, or get a head start on your next grant submission. Here’s some tips that can help keep our productivity high!

1. **Have a set work space.** Clear off your desk or a spot on a table and make it your home office area.
2. **Get organized.** Use this time to organize your files so you don’t lose track of all the data you have.
3. **Plan your day.** Make a plan for the day with to-do lists and schedules.
4. **Avoid home distractions.** Keep your work space away from the TV or bed, and keep work supplies or snack handy.
5. **Learn a new skill.** Need a break from your lab-related work? Look for a webinar or online course to learn something new (see our suggested list on [page 7](#)!)
6. **Take breaks.** Breaks are okay, but no 3 hour naps.
7. **Maintain a healthy lifestyle.** Although we should minimize outside travel, don’t let your life become sedentary. Find some videos or an app for at-home workouts (bodyweight exercises, yoga, pilates, etc.) or go for a walk.
8. **Stay connected.** Keep in touch with your co-workers or friends to keep from feeling isolated. Schedule a zoom happy hour for the end of the day!

# BCH Postdoc Achievements!

If you would like to share a recently published a paper or won an award, contact us at [postdoc-publicaffairs@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:postdoc-publicaffairs@childrens.harvard.edu) (provide your full name, lab, title and journal for publications and information on sponsor for awards). Congrats to the authors and awardees!

## Publications from BCH Postdocs

**Giuseppe Di Caprio**, Kirchhausen Lab (PCMM) published: "High-throughput assessment of hemoglobin polymer in single red blood cells from sickle cell patients under controlled oxygen tension" in PNAS, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1914056116>

**Xuefei Zhang**, Alt lab (PCMM) published 2 papers: "Fundamental roles of chromatin loop extrusion in antibody class switching." in Nature, 2019. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1723-0>

and "The fundamental role of chromatin loop extrusion in physiological V(D)J recombination." in Nature, 2019. <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1547-y>

**Ari Tabaac**, Charlton lab (Adolescent Medicine) published: "Sexual orientation-related disparities in healthcare access in three cohorts of U.S. adults." in Prev Med. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2020.105999>

**Richard Smith**, Walsh Lab (Genetics & Genomics) published: "Ion Channel Functions in Early Brain Development" in Trends in Neurosciences. 2020. [https://www.cell.com/trends/neurosciences/full-text/S0166-2236\(19\)30226-7](https://www.cell.com/trends/neurosciences/full-text/S0166-2236(19)30226-7)

**Tamara Itzel Martinez** (Adolescent Substance Use and Addiction Fellow) published: "A community-based model of HIV care for men who have sex with men and transgender women in Chicago" in International Journal of STD and AIDs. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956462419886779> and also presented an abstract of this paper at the Infectious Diseases Society of America meeting in Washington, DC in October 2019.

**Shayan Hosseinzadeh**, Kiapour lab (Orthopedic Surgery) published 2 papers: "What Is the Accuracy and Reliability of the Peritubercle Lucency Sign on Radiographs for Early Diagnosis of Slipped Capital Femoral Epiphysis Compared With MRI as the Gold Standard?" in Clin Orthop Relat Res. 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=31977443>

and "Age- and Sex-Specific Morphologic Changes in the Metaphyseal Fossa Adjacent to Epiphyseal Tubercle in Children and Adolescents without Hip Disorders." in J Orthop Res. 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=PMID%3A+32091139>

**Yohei Tomita**, Smith lab (Ophthalmology) published 2 papers: "Long-Acting FGF21 Inhibits Retinal Vascular Leakage in In Vivo and In Vitro Models" in IJMS 2020. <https://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/21/4/1188>

And "Pemafibrate Prevents Retinal Pathological Neovascularization by Increasing FGF21 Level in a Murine Oxygen-Induced Retinopathy Model" in IJMS 2019. <https://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/20/23/5878>

**Wardiya Afshar Saber**, Sahin lab (Neurology) published a review: "Recent advances in human stem cell-based modeling of Tuberous Sclerosis Complex" in Molecular Autism. 2020 <https://molecularautism.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13229-020-0320-2>

Ryann Fame, Lehtinen lab (Pathology) published 2 reviews: "Emergence and Developmental Roles of the Cerebrospinal Fluid System" in Developmental Cell. 2020 <https://authors.elsevier.com/a/1aYXc5Sx5gjd8t>

And "Brain Ventricular System and Cerebrospinal Fluid Development and Function: Light at the End of the Tube" in Bio Essays .2020 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bies.201900186>

## Awards to BCH Postdocs

**Aarti Sathyanarayana**, Mandl lab (CHIP) received the "American Epilepsy Society's Young Investigator Award" 2019 based on her work on "measuring medication effects through EEG" in close collaboration with the Loddenkemper lab.

**Rima El Atrache**, Loddenkemper's Lab (Neurology) won the "2019 Grass Foundation Young Investigator Award" based on her work on "Photoplethysmography detects blood volume pressure changes in the pre-ictal period in patients with Focal Impaired Awareness Seizures"

## Travel Awards: January -March Round



And the winners are...

**Ah Ram Jang, Deanna Chieco, Bat-Erdene Jugder, and Danielle Peterse.** Congratulations!

The next round of travel awards will be announced in the Spring, stay tuned!

## Recent Events

- MERCK Networking Event, January 21.
- Bowling Night, February 5.



- Postdoc-to-PI panel, February 11.



## OUR TEAM

### EXECUTIVE BOARD

Ari Tabaac and Hani Hari (co-presidents), Julie Sesen (treasurer), Caroline Schuster-Kubaczka (secretary)



### EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Julie Sesen, Sarah Ducamp

### CONTENT CONTRIBUTORS

Julie Sesen, Sarah Ducamp, Ari Tabaac, Sreya Ghosh, Kimberly Wong and Nicholas Hanovice

### EDITOR

Kimberly Wong

## Follow us to find out more about our great events and postdoc community!

**Leaving soon?** If you or a labmate recently moved on from your postdoc, please invite them to join our Alumni network! Send your personal email address at [postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu](mailto:postdoc@childrens.harvard.edu) to register as BCH Alumni and share your career path with the postdoc community!

## Upcoming Events

Keep up to date on upcoming events with our calendar: <https://tinyurl.com/BCHPDACalendar>

### Save the date:

2020 All-star Mentoring Event, November 5

*Unfortunately at the time of publication, all of our upcoming events (including the BCH/HMPA Game Night, Postdoc Spring Breakfast, and Career Development events) have been postponed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Look out for our emails and subscribe to our calendar to find out when our events will be rescheduled! In the meantime, check out these online resources for courses available from BCH and other institutions:*

### Online courses through Netlearning

<https://lms.netlearning.com/MyNetLearning/Login.aspx?ID=167>. Click on Learning opportunities and add the desired course (see Lu-Ann's selection below):

#### Mentoring courses

- Navigating Challenging Situations with Diplomacy and Tact
- Leveraging Emotional Intelligence
- Fostering Mentoring Relationships
- Difficult People: Why They Act That Way and How to Deal with Them
- Facing and Resolving Conflict in the Workplace
- How to Manage Difficult Conversations
- Listening Even When it's Difficult to Listen
- The Many Approaches to Facing Workplace Conflict
- Unleashing Personal and Team Creativity

#### Career Development Courses

- Avoid Procrastination by Getting Organized Instead
- Conquering the Challenges of Public Speaking
- Troublesome Words and Phrases: Common Usage Mistakes in Writing

**Scientists Teaching Science (OFT)**, April 6 - June (soft start March 30) - 9-week online discontinuous course. Apply at: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/2020\\_STS](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2020_STS)

**Python for life scientists**, April 7-8. [www.amberbiology.com/python-2day-course](http://www.amberbiology.com/python-2day-course)

**Addgene WFH Science Careers Webinars: Management 101 for Scientists**, March 26, 11AM. [www.surveymonkey.com/r/AddgeneWebinar3-26-20](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AddgeneWebinar3-26-20)