

“If You Fail to Plan, You Are Planning to Fail”

This quote is falsely attributed to Benjamin Franklin but is pivotal to the long and arduous journey of academic medicine training. This sentiment is instilled in the GW4-CAT ethos which continually encourages fellows to be strategic in preparation and adopt forward-thinking to appropriately plan for the next phase within the academic journey.

Even from the interview stage, considerable emphasis was placed on the prospective themes I was planning to take forward and exploration of how they aligned with the GW4 remit. Additionally, I was encouraged to illustrate comprehensive proposals and ideas for my work that utilised the state-of-the-art facilities across the GW4 institutions to build an internationally competitive training programme that would last beyond the relatively short three years of the PhD.

Shortly after appointment to GW4-CAT, I was compelled to create a bespoke PhD project that would act as a springboard for my academic journey. The expertise of the programme managers, directors and core supervisory team offered a critical perspective when designing my PhD. Much importance was placed on writing a robust ‘contingency plans’ section, such that all failures (inevitable in any research programme) were mitigated, tackled, and repurposed into a constructive step in the PhD journey of a thousand days (roughly three years!). During the iterative design process, I pitched my project to the directors who advised expansion of the contingency section to ensure thorough coverage and preparedness.

Workshops organised by the GW4-CAT team improved my planning techniques for the day-to-day operations. By dividing large tasks into smaller deliverables, I was able to celebrate small wins and derive immediate satisfaction from little tasks. This was important for me, since viewing the PhD project as one big task will deprive you from satisfaction for a period of 3 years! This was something that my ego could not afford, coming

from busy clinical training where every successful procedure, resuscitation, discharged patient or signed off letter was subconsciously celebrated and fed into career satisfaction.

Plan, plan and plan some more. This was the theme of the remainder of my PhD which I managed to finish on time. Ultimately, my contingency plans did not cover everything: equipment breaking down, collaborators moving away, childcare plans disrupted due to chickenpox, or indeed a COVID-19 pandemic that slowed everything down. Nevertheless, the impact was lessened by continually adapting to the emerging situation and planning for the next step.



The much-anticipated *viva voce* day was such an anti-climax, as I returned home with nothing planned for the next few weeks before I resumed clinical work. It was then, on viva day, that I set out to crystallise my strategies for the next step – a small post-doctoral grant to bridge my work from

PhD to a clinician scientist (intermediate) research fellowship application. In the spirit of GW4-CAT, I spent a lot of time planning the application – finding out about where to apply, how much money, what I can achieve with it, and what I need to do. Although I did not have a blueprint or outline for my next steps, I was aware the GW4-CAT team had already recommended the Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS) as a potential funder. I started writing the application, relying on my network of supporters built during GW4-CAT, seeking feedback, re-planning, re-writing and building on pilot data from my PhD. The application was successful, and I am now a holder of a Starter Grant for Clinical Lecturers from the AMS.

Inevitably, my post-doctoral celebrations were prematurely curtailed once again when I realised that more work and more planning needed to take place! But my academic journey can attest to the fluctuating waves of excitement within an academic career. Every success (or failure) is a mere step towards a future direction. A reflection of hard work, and an ever-challenging career in academic medicine.

Undoubtedly, the insight that GW4-CAT has provided has allowed me to form neuro-synapses that process these small wins, encourage differentiation between ‘failure’ and learning points whilst promoting tenacity and motivation to plan for the next stage.

The current challenge at hand is securing a clinician scientist (intermediate) research fellowship.

The GW4-CAT directors continue to support me as an alumnus in identifying target grants, reiterating their ongoing support beyond the PhD and continually stressing the importance of these grants for academic progression. As I write this fellowship application now, I revisit everything I learnt in my GW4-CAT journey. Unsurprisingly, as I reflect on my next steps and upcoming challenges in my academic journey, I am reminded to simply: plan, plan and plan some more.

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