



Biomedical Postdoctoral Programs

Academic Connection via Distance Communication for Mentors

#Academic Connection

#Social Distancing

Dear BPP Mentors,

We know that each of you have faced your own set of unique challenges during the pandemic impacting your research, your family, your community and you. We hope that you are weathering these difficult times and finding valuable alternative strategies for your time. As you can imagine this is also a challenging time for your postdoctoral trainees and we are writing to specifically ask for your help in supporting our postdocs *academically, professionally and personally* through these challenging times.

First and foremost, we want to emphasize that each person will respond to the pandemic differently, ranging from complete lack of concern to panic, with most landing somewhere along this continuum. Postdocs will exhibit many of the same concerns as we faculty, such as concern for family and friends, or inability to do research and the potentially negative impact that might have on a career. However, some postdocs may well exhibit distinct concerns that we faculty have not thought about. For this reason, please ask your postdoc how they are doing. Do they feel safe in their environment? Do they have access to food and resources? How are they handling the isolation of social distancing? Please refer them to postdoctoral resources at the Biomedical Postdoctoral Program (<https://www.med.upenn.edu/postdoc/>), if they have needs that are beyond your ability to address. We want all of our postdocs to come through this whole, safe, and sound.

Second, as we approach the peak of the pandemic, postdocs may start to be directly affected by SARS-CoV-2 as they, their family, or their friends develop COVID19 symptoms. We ask that you be flexible and understanding as they face these challenges. The postdoc may not think to tell you that someone close to them is experiencing COVID19; they may feel you do not want to know, or do not need to know. We know all of you do indeed care. Each time you check in with your trainee, a good habit would be to ask how they and those close to them are doing.

Third, we want to find ways for postdocs to remain connected to their research projects, to their laboratories, and to BPP. We have provided information to our postdocs to help them maintain connections while they are social distancing. These guidelines, provide ideas for postdocs to develop a plan to continue their professional journey and develop additional skills during the laboratory shutdown. Below we outline ways you can work with your postdoc to develop a productive and flexible program.

- Discuss an individualized, goal-oriented plan with your postdoc (<https://www.med.upenn.edu/postdoc/postdoc-training-individualdevelopmentplan.html>)
 - The main focus of the plan is to advance the research goals of the postdoc's main project under these extraordinary circumstances.
 - Mentors should be creatively helping their postdocs define the goals for such plan, and lay down markers for attaining them, in a manner that is tailored to the discipline, the stage of work, and the postdoc/mentor needs.
- Continue to hold or consider holding regular group meetings (remotely, e.g. by BlueJeans).
- Continue to hold regular, weekly meetings one-on-one with the Mentee (remotely, e.g. by BlueJeans).
- Some trainees in your lab might well be collaborating with more junior personnel in the lab, or even partially mentor such personnel. In such cases, it may be important for you to directly engage all parties to collaboratively develop plans, discuss literature and stay connected.
- Suggest academic and other research resources to your mentee(s) that are project- and discipline-specific.
- Suggest at least one area for 'enrichment' to your postdoc(s). Enrichment should not necessarily be a solo endeavor. Instead promote the idea that trainees should seek out 'affinity groups' or 'intellectual hubs' within their labs, within their collaborations, and with the Biomedical Postdoctoral Council (<https://www.med.upenn.edu/bpc/>). Also, your postdocs will find useful resources for online training at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1aUD6q3sk488Dclfe_CQNYe_vsR07qQvr0rwHgds1z4s/edit#gid=112939788
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We **thank you** for all your efforts during these difficult times and hope you all remain healthy and safe. We look forward to seeing all of you in the "real" soon.

The BPP and BGS teams