NIH Global Health Interest Group, Seminar Series
October 24, 2012
Seminar Title: Finding Your Way Into Global Health Careers: From Bench to Desk Job
Presenter: Ranjan Gupta, Ph.D., Regional Officer, Office of Global Research, NIAID

Dr. Gupta first gave a brief description/definition of what global health is. He said it is a relatively new discipline that grew out of the public health and international health disciplines. Briefly, it can be defined (Koplan et al., 2009) as "*an area for study, research and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all people worldwide. Global health emphasizes transnational health issues, determinants and solutions; involves many disciplines within and beyond the health sciences and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration; and is a synthesis of population-based prevention with individual-level clinical care*". Global health has grew in recent years based on a number of factors. These include the widespread recognition of the ideas within the "Grand Challenges in Global Health" (Varmus et al. 2003, Science) document and subsequent expansion of resources dedicated to improving global health, e.g. US government, foundations, PEPFAR, Global Fund, Gates Foundation. Global health has also achieved heightened public visibility through US foreign policy and through greater emphasis on internationalization of the global health curriculum.

In general, global health disciplines are multidisciplinary and can be broadly grouped into "conventional" areas and "other" areas. More conventional jobs include health care providers, epidemiologists, biomedical and clinical researchers, and jobs within regulatory affairs. In addition there are other, ancillary-type jobs in the global health field that range from business management, marketing and engineering to law, communications and international affairs. In summary, global health careers span a wide range of disciplines.

In order to transition smoothly from bench science into a career in global health, Dr. Gupta recommends several different avenues. These include doing short-term internships, rotations or fellowships in global health positions to gain experience. He also mentioned signing up for training programs and finding opportunities to perform volunteer work. Another way to get your foot in the door is to do some freelance writing and/or participate in committees involved in reviewing or formulating global health policies.

To be successful in global health several skills need to be honed. In addition to being a subject matter expert in your particular area, Dr. Gupta also recommends being a generalist and developing broad knowledge in diverse areas. This can be accomplished by, for example, reading extensively from diverse periodicals such as News and Commentaries in Science, The Economist, Lancet, and the New York Times. The ability to communicate science effectively across different disciplines is also extremely important. You must be able to articulate scientific ideas in simple terms and write succinctly and clearly. Most importantly, be brief but thorough. In addition, getting management experience as well as having strong analytical and correlative skills will be very beneficial for any job within the global health field.

Dr. Gupta says that life as a global health officer (his current position) is interesting and entails performing many different functions while working with a diverse group of people. Job functions include: 1) coordinating programs and meetings, 2) managing research and operations programs, 3) drafting policy documents, position papers and agreements, 4) reviewing policy documents, papers, agreements and providing subject matter expertise and 5)

participating in high-level meetings and negotiations.

The outlook of career opportunities in global health is promising. Dr. Gupta cited a 2009 publication (Global Health Jobs: What You Need to Know by Oliver Subasinghe) which estimates that the needed global health workforce may exceed 100,000 by 2020. Again, these jobs are diverse and can be found within a diverse group of entities. These include positions within the government (HHS, State Department, US Congress), international organizations (WHO, UNICEF, World Bank), non-governmental organizations (BMGF, IAVI, think/action tanks), professional societies (AAAS, ASM), academic settings (University Departments of Public/Global Health), and also in industry (Pfizer, development of vaccines and therapeutics for global campaigns).