

ASPHO Career Path Spotlight

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Career Description

1. **Current position:** Associate Professor, Division of Oncology in the Cancer and Blood Diseases Institute; Director, Comprehensive Neurofibromatosis Center
2. **Institution:** Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
3. **Years at institution:** 0.75 years (started at CCHMC in September 2025)
4. **Did you complete additional post-fellowship training? Was it an important factor in your current position?** I did not do a formal second fellowship, however I did have the opportunity to do an additional year of fellowship research as a senior fellow at the National Institutes of Health with Dr. Brigitte Widemann which was extremely helpful for allowing me to move forward with my career as a clinical researcher.
5. **Years out of Fellowship:** I finished my formal Pediatric Hematology/Oncology fellowship at Children's National in 2017 but did an extra year of research as a senior fellow at the National Institutes of Health until June 2018; based on this I've been out of fellowship for 8 years.
6. **Type of institution: (Academic center, clinical center, private practice, Research facility, Industry, Non-profit):** Academic Center (though until this past year I was at a government facility – the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center)
7. **Approximate number of attendings in your PHO department/division:** There are over 100 clinical and research faculty in our division.
8. **How do you allocate your effort? (*Please provide a % for each area)**

Clinical Service	60 %
Research and Scholarly Activities	25 %
Teaching and Mentoring	5 %
Service and Leadership	10 %
9. **Position Specifics (Please give a brief description of your current responsibilities in these areas)**
 - a. **Clinical activity:** I do 6 weeks/year of inpatient service covering our Solid Tumor/Neuro-oncology service and 1 day/week of outpatient clinic. My outpatient clinic is primarily patients with Neurofibromatosis (NF) and Schwannomatosis-associated peripheral nerve sheath tumors (plexiform neurofibromas, malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumors and schwannomas) though I also see patients with sporadic (not associated with a tumor predisposition syndrome) peripheral nerve sheath tumors.



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- b. *Scholarship/Research:*** I am a clinical researcher and primarily focus on trials for patients with Neurofibromatosis type 1. I am currently the principal investigator for a multi-site phase 2 study being run through the Neurofibromatosis Clinical Trials Consortium (NFCTC) of the MEK inhibitor selumetinib for the prevention of plexiform neurofibroma growth and morbidity. In addition, I am interested in developing improved surveillance and management strategies for the prevention of malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumors. I also am fortunate to continue to collaborate closely with the National Institutes of Health Neurofibromatosis Team, led by Dr. Brigitte Widemann, on several research projects.
- c. *Education/Teaching:*** I give the CCHMC pediatric hematology/oncology fellows a lecture on Neurofibromatosis and Schwannomatosis as part of their educational curriculum and of course enjoy working with and teaching the fellows and residents when I'm on inpatient service. In addition, I am working on developing and increasing our NF patient and family educational resources and experiences.
- d. *Administration:*** I direct the CCHMC Neurofibromatosis Program which includes coordination across both Oncology and Genetics divisions of Cincinnati Children's.

Career Perspectives

- 1. What were important factors in your taking on this role (e.g., professional interest, family, geography, spousal profession)? What made this career path appealing?**

I felt extremely fortunate when the opportunity arose to take on this current role at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center (CCHMC)! I did my pediatric residency training here 15 years ago and have always loved working here. The general culture at CCHMC of positivity and constantly working towards improving the quality of clinical care and outcomes for our patients and their families has always been inspiring to me, and I feel lucky to get to work with such an amazing group of people! Prior to this position, I had the pleasure to work for 10 years at the National Institutes of Health in the Pediatric Oncology Branch of the Center for Cancer Research. In that role, I learned how to write and run clinical trials for rare diseases, with a particular focus on Neurofibromatosis (NF). During my time there, I discovered that I loved working with basic scientists and other researchers to bring cutting-edge science to my patients through clinical trials. I also enjoy the unique challenges of designing and implementing clinical trials in the rare disease space, where collaboration and cooperation not only with other researchers but also with patients and their families are truly essential for success.

- 2. Is there specific training or experience that helped you obtain this position?** My time at the National Institutes of Health working with Dr. Brigitte Widemann on her landmark studies of people with Neurofibromatosis Type 1, including both natural history and interventional trials,

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directly led to my current position. I started working with Dr. Widemann on these projects during my fellowship and was able to stay on afterwards as her staff clinician to help her run and expand her Neurofibromatosis program. During that time, I was also able to take on leadership roles in national Neurofibromatosis organizations such as the Neurofibromatosis Clinical Trials Consortium (NFCTC) and the Response Evaluation in Neurofibromatosis and Schwannomatosis (REiNS) international collaboration. My work during this time, and in particular the collaborations and connections I established in these leadership roles, led to the amazing opportunity I now have to direct the NF program here at CCHMC.

- 3. Is this career path what you expected? Please explain.** Yes and no! Since the beginning of my fellowship, I knew I wanted to focus on oncology and was excited about the idea of being a clinical researcher, though I had very little idea of what it truly entailed! However, I did not have a particular interest or awareness of Neurofibromatosis before beginning my research with Dr. Widemann at the NIH – I just knew she was an amazing clinical researcher from whom I wanted to learn! After joining her group, I soon became fascinated by the complexities of Neurofibromatosis, a truly multi-system disorder, and one where there are so many opportunities for improving the lives of our patients and their families. I also found the NF research community to be an incredibly welcoming and collaborative one and was impressed by how much patients and families have been a part of driving the research agenda in the field. For all these reasons, I decided to stay in the NF space after fellowship and have been so grateful to continue to get to work with this wonderful patient, researcher and advocacy community!
- 4. What do you find most rewarding about your current professional role?** One of the things I love most about working with patients and families with NF is the opportunity to be part of a larger team providing multi-disciplinary “whole person” care. In many ways, I look at my current role as one of bringing together the amazing existing expertise from multiple divisions to advance not only clinical care but also research for these conditions.
- 5. What do you find most challenging about your current professional role?** Since I came to CCHMC after being at outside institutions for over 10 years, one of the biggest challenges has been learning how current systems are set up so that I can work within them to figure out what (if any) changes might help facilitate the growth of our NF program. In recent decades many separate teams here at CCHMC, such as geneticists, neurologists, oncologists and basic scientists, have had a strong record of pioneering NF clinical care and research. My current goal is to figure out how to integrate and enhance all these efforts across disciplines without simply adding extra meetings or administrative burdens. Thankfully, all my colleagues here at CCHMC have been incredibly welcoming and open to working together on building these collaborations so I’m very optimistic about the future!

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6. **What do you see yourself doing in 5 years and 10 years?** Having just started in my role as Director of the Comprehensive Neurofibromatosis Center, I hope that in 5 years I am still here and can look back at significant progress having been made in advancing the mission of our program. It's also a very exciting time in the NF research space and I'm hopeful that new technologies and treatment approaches over the next 5-10 years will improve our ability to treat and prevent the tumor and non-tumor manifestations of these conditions and generally improve the overall quality of life of our patients and their families!