

ASPHO Career Path Spotlight

Irina Pateva, MD



Career Description

1. **Current position:** Pediatric hematology/oncology attending physician, Associate Professor of Pediatrics
2. **Institution:** Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center, Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine
3. **Years at institution:** 10
4. **Did you complete additional post-fellowship training? Was it an important factor in your current position?**

I did not complete post-fellowship training. I have focused my clinical and scholarly efforts around Vascular Anomalies and Rare Disorders and have continued to learn through practice and networking with colleagues and experts from around the country.

5. **Years out of Fellowship:** 7
6. **Type of institution:** Academic Center
7. **Approximate number of attendings in your PHO department/division:** 14
8. **How do you allocate your effort?**
Clinical- 55%, **Scholarship-** 15%, **Education-** 20%, **Administration-** 5%, **Other** – 5% service on different committees and reviewer for medical journals
9. **Position Specifics (Please give a brief description of your current responsibilities in these areas)**

a. Clinical activity

I attend on the inpatient and outpatient settings of our service. While on the inpatient heme/onc service I take care of patients with various oncological and hematological diagnoses as well as patients prior to- and post- bone marrow transplantation. I also see patients for hematology consultations in our hospital. In the outpatient setting I follow patients with benign and malignant hematological diagnoses. I see patients in the Vascular Anomalies Clinic, which is a monthly multidisciplinary clinic, as well as follow those same patients in my heme/onc clinic for longitudinal management. I identify myself as a clinician educator, a clinical investigator, and a hematologist with a subspecialty interest in Vascular Anomalies.

b. Scholarship/Research

My research activities are mainly in the area of clinical research. I am the Principal Investigator of several clinical trials and biology studies. For example, I have advocated and secured full participation of our clinical program in a pharmaceutical company –

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sponsored Phase I clinical trial for patients with complex vascular anomalies. I have also become a collaborator with my colleagues from around the country in describing rare cases and case series of patients with vascular anomalies. Additionally, I am the creator and Principal Investigator of an active protocol for a pediatric live tumor biorepository, which involves the collection and propagation of pediatric tumor samples through the establishment of patient-derived xenografts in immune-deficient mice. This academic effort enhances ongoing translational research efforts within our program in discovery of targeted anti-cancer therapies. I oversee several retrospective chart review and health systems database studies which were designed to answer questions that have arisen from clinical practice or portend clinical dilemmas.

c. *Education/Teaching*

I enjoy working at an academic institution where the teaching opportunities are endless. I have the pleasure to teach in real time multiple fellows, residents, and medical students on a daily basis, in the environment of both the outpatient clinic and inpatient unit. I mentor many fellows, residents and medical students for their research projects and scholarly activities. It has been a great pleasure to see my trainees accomplish project goals, describe interesting patient cases and present at national and local meetings. I give lectures to fellows, residents and students on different topics, mostly in the areas of benign hematology, transfusion medicine and vascular anomalies. I am also a Faculty Advisor of two medical student interest groups. I participate in three Educational Committees of National Organizations, including the ASPHO Vascular Anomalies Specialty Interest Group Education Committee (of which I am the Vice-Chair) and I am a member of the ASPHO I-HOP (Immunology for the Hematologist/Oncologist) Specialty Interest Group Education Committee.

Additionally, I had the honor to be an Associate Fellowship Program Director of our pediatric hematology/oncology fellowship program for 3 years and have also served intermittently as our Division's residency and student clerkship liaison.

d. *Administration*

I serve on several institutional committees such as the Institutional Review Board, Transfusion Medicine Committee, and the Chemotherapy Task Force.

e. *Other*

I serve as a committee member for several national organizations such as the North American Immunohematology Clinical Education and Research Consortium (NICER) in addition to the ASPHO SIG committees mentioned above.

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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?**

The role of a clinician educator has always been the best pathway for myself because of my professional and personal interests. I was fortunate to be able to stay as faculty at the same program where I completed fellowship training, with the opportunity to develop my own areas of expertise and had the benefit of protected time, allowing me to develop a healthy balance of academic and clinical activity. The interest in Vascular Anomalies came serendipitously when an ENT colleague was looking for someone to help with medical management using sirolimus in a patient with a lymphatic malformation, and one of my colleagues recommended me to take care of this patient. That is how my interest was sparked and I started learning about vascular anomalies from the medical literature, discussions with my colleagues, attendance at specialty meetings and active participation in the ASPHO Vascular Anomalies SIG. The need for a specialist to medically manage patients with vascular anomalies at our institution and within our program, together with my availability and interest to do so, were the key factors that led me in that direction, and I could also say that “I was in the right place at the right time.”

- 2. Is there specific training or experience that helped you obtain this position?**

I have not undergone extra formal training but have established my expertise through a lot of reading, by reviewing literature and through many discussions with my colleagues and with experts from around the country regarding patient care and areas of current research. Being part of the Education Committee of the ASPHO VA SIG has helped me a lot – both to learn and to educate; we share experience with each other and develop educational tools with a goal to disseminate knowledge for our pediatric hematology/oncology colleagues, mid-level providers and trainees.

- 3. Is this career path what you expected? Please explain.**

While the career path of a clinician educator was expected for me, the interest and sub-specialization in Vascular Anomalies came unexpectedly. As I mentioned, I happened to be in the right place at the right time and I am very fortunate to be part of the ASPHO VA SIG.

- 4. What do you find most rewarding about your current professional role?**

There are multiple rewarding aspects of my current role. I have devoted my professional efforts to the development of expertise in rare diseases, particularly in vascular anomalies and immunohematology. These are rare pediatric conditions that remain a significant unmet medical need and clinical management challenge. However, the rapidly advancing technologies in genomics, cell and gene-replacement therapies promise to change outcomes for many of these patients. I hope to facilitate the application of these advances to the care of the patients at our

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hospital. Whether it is with improvement of symptoms, connecting patients with experts or with patient advocacy groups, I feel it is rewarding to be able to make even a small contribution to better the quality of life of these patients. I very much enjoy working with my colleagues from the ASPHO VA SIG and developing educational materials, tools, and programs. I am very excited to see younger colleagues getting intrigued by the field and participating in the initiatives and interest groups. It has been an inspiration for me to learn from experts in this field such as Drs. Denise Adams and Francine Blei who are absolute role models for compassionate physicians and incredible mentors.

5. What do you find most challenging about your current professional role?

The challenges are perhaps no different for myself than for many of my colleagues: juggling clinical and academic work and maintaining high quality of patient care while simultaneously educating trainees. Dealing with patients with rare diseases can be challenging because of the lack of a variety of current medical therapies, scarce funding for research and lack of providers who are willing and able to manage these patients as they transition to adulthood.

6. What do you see yourself doing in 5 years and 10 years?

My goal and vision for the trajectory of my career is to build on my current knowledge (and expertise) and to solidify my role as a clinician- educator with a focus on rare diseases. I am excited to be able to contribute to the work of the ASPHO Vascular Anomalies and I-HOP Specialty Interest Groups and their corresponding Education Committees. Through these activities I am hopeful to contribute to the training of our future pediatric hematologists/oncologists and to spark the interest in more providers who would love going into the field.