

THSNA Travel-to-a-Mentor Award Recipient: Dr. Deva Sharma, M.D., M.S.

Mentor: Dr. Andra James, M.D., M.P.H.

Date: 6-19-2018



My visit to Duke University to meet with my mentor, Dr. Andra James, was an incredible experience. The first day began with brunch with Dr. James, during which time she talked to me about her career trajectory. Her interest in hematologic disorders began when she was a midwife, and cared for a woman with excessive postpartum bleeding who passed away. This experience motivated her to make a difference in the lives of women with bleeding disorders, ultimately leading her to go to medical school and become an international expert in the field. Dr. James introduced me to her hematology and obstetrician colleagues at Duke who are actively vested in advancing the care of women with acute and chronic blood disorders. I attended maternal fetal medicine and therapeutic apheresis rounds during my visit, allowing me the opportunity to learn about the management of complex hematologic cases in real time. Dr. James gave me one-on-one lectures about hematologic complications of pregnancy, such as HELLP syndrome and thrombocytopenia, in her home. This allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the pathophysiology of hematologic disorders in pregnancy, which I am frequently consulted about as an adult hematology fellow. Through her lectures, I also gained new insight into the rationale for therapies that are used to treat these conditions.

During dinner, I had the privilege of meeting nationally renowned hematologists at Duke, who talked to me about their own career development. The following day, I met with Dr. Nirmish Shah, a successful physician scientist and hematologist who is collaborating with me on a study of acute vaso-occlusive pain associated with menstruation in women with sickle cell disease. Dr. Shah reviewed my preliminary data from this study, which involves the use of mobile applications on iPod touch devices to prospectively study acute vaso-occlusive pain in relation to menstruation. He also discussed the factors that positively influenced him to become a hematologist and clinical investigator. After our discussion, he invited me to attend a seminar about the use of digital health technology for research studies, which was helpful for my current study. I left Dr. Shah with several iPod touch

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devices, so that he can recruit participants at Duke as part of a multicenter effort to study menstruation-related morbidity in women with sickle cell disease. He already has IRB approval for this study. I look forward to our collaborations and his continued mentorship as I pursue this important and understudied topic in women's health.

Later in the afternoon, I met with a physician scientist who is studying the role of complement activation in heparin-induced thrombocytopenia, Dr. Gowthami Arepally. She sat down with me and talked with me about my career goals. I discussed that I would like to become a physician scientist focused on the study of reproductive health challenges in women with sickle cell disease. She provided me with guidance to achieve this goal in a stepwise approach.

The visit ended back in the home of Dr. James. We ate lunch together and reflected on the visit and what we had both learned from this mentee-mentorship experience. Dr. James and I discussed future collaborations to address obstetric and gynecologic challenges in women with sickle cell disease and other chronic blood disorders. As a first step, over the phone, we will outline a plan to write a manuscript about acquired factor VIII inhibitors in pregnancy. I look forward to her continued mentorship, which has been outstanding.