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Trust me, I'm a doctor

How many advanced degrees does one really need? PhD/JDs are growing. PhD/MBAs abound. And MD/PhDs are downright commonplace. A panel of young scientists-turned-businesspeople debated the question last week at the Yale Biotechnology Student Interest Group in New Haven, Connecticut.

Julie Huang started out studying for an MD, moved to public health and, after completing her MPH, "followed the herd to Wall Street" to work as an investment banker before switching to biomedical public relations. She is now vice-president of public-relations agency Cohn & Wolfe Healthcare in New York.

After a postdoc at Johns Hopkins University, John Puziss joined chemical firm Bristol-Myers Squibb, where he started out in fungicides but ended up looking for technology partners. He turned that experience, and an encounter with a postdoc-era friend, into a business-development job at a small proteomics firm. But as the company grew, he found himself doing more sales. So he jumped at the chance to work in technology transfer at Yale University, where he is associate director of its Office of Cooperative Research.

Frank Wang realized during his fellowship that he didn't want to take the academic track. Landing a job with London-based international consultancy McKinsey, he spent a year each in Beijing and Hong Kong. Then the economy faltered and the company shed employees; he is now on Yale's MBA course.

Wang thinks an MBA will make him more competitive. Puziss is not convinced that more degrees are the answer for everyone. Huang concludes that there is no formula, and no easy way to reach career goals, as each story illustrates: "You have to create your own path, as crazy as it might seem or as difficult as it might be."

Paul Smaglik
Naturejobs editor



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