



COMMENT

Early Career Investigator Highlight: Lyndsay A. Harshman

Lyndsay A. Harshman ¹*Pediatric Research* (2021) 89:402; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41390-020-01284-7>

I am a pediatric nephrologist and the medical director of Pediatric Kidney Transplant at the University of Iowa Stead Family Children's Hospital. I grew up in a small town in southern Iowa (Centerville, IA) and then came to the University of Iowa for my undergraduate degree. As an undergraduate student, I first became engaged with research under the mentorship of Irwin Levin, Ph.D., in the University of Iowa Department of Psychology—Dr. Levin sought me out to work with his lab after I completed his research methods course in my freshman year of college. With his early mentorship, I had opportunities for leadership, development of projects within the lab, and eventual manuscript preparation/publications. I then went on to complete medical school at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine. While in medical school, I quickly realized how much I missed being involved in research and sought out a chance to participate in the Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship (2008–2009). With the Duke Fellowship, I experienced neuroimaging research for the first time under the mentorship of Natalie Denburg, Ph.D.

Upon returning to clerkships after my research year-out, I fell in love with pediatric nephrology as a field during an M4

elective with our pediatric nephrology team (Patrick Brophy, M.D.; now Chair—Pediatrics; Golisano Children's, Rochester, NY). I loved the complexity of patients and the opportunity for longitudinal patient care. As I cared for transplant patients, I felt as though there was a distinct knowledge gap in an area of my focus: neurodevelopment in chronic disease. Why did so many young adults with kidney transplant struggle with medication adherence? I was unsatisfied with the idea that this was “simply” due to the effect of being in the hospital/chronic disease, but felt that there could be a potential neurobiological underpinning explaining the observed adherence and neurocognitive deficits. To support these high-level research goals during my fellowship, I sought additional mentorship from Peg Nopoulos, M.D. (Chair—Department of Psychiatry, University of Iowa). With Dr. Nopoulos' dedication and mentorship, I applied for and was awarded a K23 (NIH/NIDDK) during my final year of fellowship.

I often tell my kids (ages 4 and 7), “you can do hard things!” Is research easy? No. Is research always fun? No—somedays it honestly just feels next to impossible to put two coherent sentences together on a focused research topic. On those days when research doesn't feel easy or fun—maybe just plain impossible!—I have gotten more comfortable with the idea that I can feel stuck with the process of research and that is “ok.” Medicine is hard; research is hard. But with perseverance, mentorship, training, and support, those “hard things” become a do-able reality.

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