

HOW TO... EMBRACE LEADERSHIP

Clinical Scientist and Molecular Pathology Lead **Siobhan Taylor** discusses applying for a leadership programme and the benefits it has brought.

The last 12 months have been a personal journey of self-discovery and realisation. It was while attending the Women in Healthcare Science Leadership day in May 2018 that I realised how intrinsically linked my future career goals were to the development of my leadership abilities. I was inspired to hear from other female healthcare scientists and network with like-minded, ambitious female healthcare scientists from across the sector.

In January 2018, I was the only Clinical Scientist working within a large histology laboratory in Cheltenham. My role is unique and largely based around the development and management of the HER2 and molecular pathology services. I have always been committed to my own personal development and passionate about providing a patient-focused, effective and efficient service, but I was struggling to recognise my capabilities and this was impacting future progression.

I was looking into the Higher Specialist Scientific Training programme (HSST) and a colleague put me in touch with

Dr Jo Horne, a dual registered scientist also working in histology, and an existing CSO WISE Fellow. During our communications, Jo suggested I seriously consider applying for the 2018 Fellowship.

First steps

I recalled seeing the advert in March encouraging “aspiring female leaders to apply for this highly prestigious and competitive programme”. I was excited. It sounded like an excellent opportunity and I fitted the eligibility criteria. But this was quickly followed by thoughts of self-doubt: I will never make it through the application process. What have I got to offer? How is leadership relevant to my career goals? And how would I fit it around my existing responsibilities of part-time working and mother to two young children? Jo’s encouragement thankfully made me re-consider.

The application process itself was a rewarding and valuable self-reflection exercise, helping me to appreciate just how much I have achieved in my career, and how much leadership has been pivotal in that journey.

The Career Development Programme (Skills 4 UK) in the early part of the Fellowship

consisted of four one-day workshops addressing communication styles and effective communication, presentation skills and goal setting. It has given me a greater self-awareness with an overall effect of improved self-confidence. I have always shied away from seeking feedback, but with a new-found strength and courage, I have learnt how valuable it can be in identifying areas of development. From this new-found understanding, I have come to believe in my own ability, tap into my strengths and know how to build and focus on becoming the best I can be.

I feel equipped with the tools to embrace and better deal with the outcomes of challenging situations, and more confident communicating at all levels of the organisation, allowing me to influence effectively. I have been able to bring this learning back to my own team, supporting and encouraging colleagues in their own development. I have also led in the innovation of my areas, taking on new responsibilities and developing services allowing me to have a greater impact on my department, my trust and overall patient care. Whilst the mentoring element of the Fellowship is still in the early stages, it is already allowing me to break down my goals into smaller actions

and take my ideas to a higher level, bringing them to life at accelerated speed.

Working together

The three Fellows with whom I joined the programme have been a source of inspiration and support to me, acting as a soundboard and offering practical advice when I have needed it. I think it fair to say that all four of us have come to appreciate how intertwined our roles are within the patient care pathway, all working to achieve the same outcome. I have come to appreciate the value of a network that reaches beyond my own team, my own trust and my own discipline of HCS. I have had the fortune of attending the CSO conference and a number of NHS England Healthcare Science meetings, as well as *The Lancet* “Advancing women in science, medicine, and global health” London launch in February this year. These, in combination with getting in touch with my lead healthcare scientist, have really highlighted the importance of all healthcare scientists working together, to raise our profile and allow us to contribute more effectively to the delivery of the *NHS Long Term Plan*.

I have long wanted to use my experiences to inspire future generations with school outreach and this year I took the plunge, finding it a rewarding and valuable experience. Both the mentoring aspect of the Fellowship, and involvement with WISE has highlighted the importance of role models, particularly for women in STEM; I am excited to start running their outreach programme “My Skills My Life” in local schools as soon as I have completed training.

The last year has intensified my desire to be the best that I can be and I am excited and optimistic for what the remainder of my career could be, with a little carefully planning, a new-found confidence and the right support network. So, what advice would I give to anyone reading this

and considering the opportunity? If you want to explore who you are and what kind of leader you could be – be brave, push aside the self-doubt and apply. Find out who your trust lead healthcare scientist is and get in touch. Join twitter and expand your network. This year, the amended CSO WISE Programme is being offered to 32 applicants, it’s an opportunity to realise your own potential, increase your contribution and impact on patient care and inspire future generations. The benefits are far reaching – you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. 

Siobhan Taylor is the current recipient of the Chief Scientific Officer Women in Science and Engineering Fellowship.

 Follow Siobhan on twitter at [siobhanT1979](https://twitter.com/siobhanT1979). The CSO WISE Healthcare Science Leadership Development Programme for NHS England is now talking applications for 2019. The deadline to apply is 10 May. For application details and further information on WISE, visit wisecampaign.org.uk

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