Efforts to Support Postdoctoral Training at MD Anderson

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Director, Research Education & Training

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A recording of this panel discussion is accessible on the myPDO Monthly archive of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). NPA membership is required for access.
Pay and Benefits for Postdocs on Individual NRSA Fellowships
Postdoctoral fellows are employees at MD Anderson

MD Anderson is a large state institution of higher education and academic medical center covered by federal and state laws and regulations, UT System and institutional policies and procedures, etc., etc. There are multiple stakeholders (decision-makers and beneficiaries.)
Decision-Makers, Stakeholders, and Recent Wins
Internal and External Decision-Makers and Stakeholders

State of Texas

The University of Texas System
Nine academic institutions.
Five health institutions.

Federal, State and Private Funding Agencies

MD Anderson President
Peter WT Pisters, MD, MHCM

SVP & Chief Academic Officer
Carin Hagberg, MD, FASA
Research Education & Training
Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences
Faculty Senate

SVP, People, Culture & Infra.
Shibu Varghese
HR Faculty & Academic Partnerships

SVP, Chief Financial Officer
Omer Sultan
Financial Planning and Analysis
Research Finance

SVP, Chief Scientific Officer
Giulio Draetta, MD, PhD
Research Strategy & Operations

SVP, Research Admin & Ind. Relns.
Ferran Prat, PhD, JD
Research Administration
Office of Sponsored Programs

Student/Trainee Representatives
Postdoctoral Association
House Staff Senate
Graduate Student Association
Some Recent Wins (Past 5 Years)

**Enhancement of Trainee Leave Plan**
Education & Training, HR Faculty & Academic Partnerships

- **Confirmed that EDU-specific plan is more advantageous than PTO plan**
- **Vacation days**
  - Increased from 15 per year to 20 per year
  - Carries forward automatically (subject to limits)
- **Sick days**
  - Increased from 10 per year to 12.5 per year
  - Carries forward automatically (subject to limits)
- **Access to Reduced Pay Leave benefit**
  - Additional protected time
  - After exhaustion of vacation and sick time, paid at 50%*

**Childcare Leave (for All Employees)**
Executive Leadership, UTS Board of Regents

- **100% paid leave for up to 4 weeks**
  - Covers birth, adoption or foster placement
  - Used concurrently with any unpaid protected leave (e.g., FML)
  - Available to either parent

**Expanded Eligibility to Apply for Grants**
Education & Training, Office of Sponsored Programs

- **Previously**
  - Postdocs can only be PIs of fellowships, career development awards, other mentored training funding
- **Starting Sept. 2023**
  - Postdocs can apply for independent research grants as PI (additional approvals required)

* The full allocation of vacation and sick days are granted on Day 1 and upon annual reappointment instead of being earned (or accrued under the PTO plan) monthly. The tradeoff is that unused vacation times cannot be cashed out upon completion of postdoc.
Postdoc Stipends
Sample Cost of Living Calculations

Courtesy of the Cobanoglu et al. (2022 Postdoctoral Association)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Postdoc</th>
<th>Postdoc + Spouse</th>
<th>Postdoc + Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gross salary (PGY0)</td>
<td>4,570</td>
<td>4,570</td>
<td>4,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal taxes</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement (TRS)</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical insurance</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision &amp; dental</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/T disability</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net income</strong></td>
<td>3,370</td>
<td>3,010</td>
<td>2,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groceries</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car payment &amp; insurance</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disposable income</strong></td>
<td>490</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>(1,015)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What about additional costs and unexpected emergencies?

- Emergency room visits ($500 co-pay)
- Medication for chronic conditions (e.g., insulin)
- Health & fitness (e.g., gym membership)
- Clothing
- Travel to hometown or home country
- Visa applications
- Vacation
- Eating out
- Social activities
- Contributing to additional retirement savings plans

Note: 75% of our postdocs are internationals. Spouses cannot work unless sponsored separately for an appropriate visa or work authorization.

COMPENSATION WAS IDENTIFIED AS THE TOP CONCERN.

“If we cannot pay our bills, do you think we even care about applying for grants and other career development opportunities?”

Examples from single-income households
## Postdoc Compensation at Selected Peer Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Postdoc Salary</th>
<th>Additional Compensation and/or Hidden Savings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MD Anderson</td>
<td>Houston, TX</td>
<td>NRSA with set stipend per PGY. Starts at PGY0 – $56.4k.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>Minimum $60k. No published max.</td>
<td>Subsidized housing, childcare allowance, <strong>mass transit (can forgo car ownership)</strong>, low-cost dependent healthcare ($49/mo.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Cambridge, MA</td>
<td>Minimum $67k. No published max.</td>
<td>Childcare supplement, off-campus housing support, some on-campus housing, free on-campus care, low-cost dependent healthcare (i.e., student plan), <strong>mass transit (can forgo car ownership)</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford</td>
<td>Stanford, CA</td>
<td>Minimum $68.2k. No published max.</td>
<td>Childcare supplement (up to $5k), relocation assistance (temporary housing), university housing, on-campus childcare facility (+ subsidy). Lower cost dependent healthcare (1/2 cost of MDA).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanderbilt</td>
<td>Nashville, TN</td>
<td>NRSA for PGY as floor. No published max.</td>
<td>Department billed for postdoc and dependent healthcare, eligibility for tuition assistance, on-campus childcare facility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Jude</td>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
<td>Minimum $70k. No published max.</td>
<td>Sign on bonus, annual professional development allowance, relocation assistance (temporary housing), low-cost dependent healthcare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van Andel Institute</td>
<td>Grand Rapids, MI</td>
<td>Set stipend per PGY level. PGY0 - $70k; PGY6 - $83k.</td>
<td>Stipend supplementation (fellowship recipients), relocation ($3k + move coordinator), low-cost dependent healthcare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT Southwestern</td>
<td>Dallas, TX</td>
<td>NRSA for PGY minimum. HHMI scale - $70k starting for all postdocs (if department has HHMI faculty).</td>
<td>Postdocs eligible for ORP, stipend supplementation (fellowship recipients, may vary by department), on-campus childcare facility, free on-campus athletic facility, discounted transit passes, cheaper campus parking options ($125-500 per year).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Addressing NIH ACD/Postdoc Working Group Recommendations
Who Needs to Respond to the Recommendations of the NIH/ACD Group on Postdoc Training

**The Feds**

- National Institutes of Health and other federal funding agencies
- Congress (e.g., NRSA program)
- Departments of Homeland Security and State (e.g., visas)
- And many others…

**The institution (as the whole institution or as represented by the postdoc office)**

- Complicated, expensive, or very very many stakeholders; or
- “Simple”, little to no incremental expense
Initiatives Completed or in Advanced Stages

RECOMMENDATION 1
Increase pay and benefits for all NIH-supported scholars.

All postdocs (regardless of funding source) treated as employees. Enhancements to benefits (leave plan) made. Postdoc term limits (across all institutions) exist.

*Efforts are currently in progress to address postdoc compensation.*

RECOMMENDATION 2
Create and expand mechanisms to support the full talent pool of postdoctoral scholars.

Worked with OSP to expand types of grants that postdocs (including internationals can apply for). Change to policies so that multi-year J-1s are available.

RECOMMENDATION 3
Facilitate transition of postdoctoral scholars into their next career stage, including roles beyond academic faculty.

RECOMMENDATION 4
Promote training and professional development of postdoctoral scholars and their mentors

Additional hires to support the creation of new and improvement of existing professional development opportunities for postdocs, focusing on: (1) research skills, (2) professional skills, and (3) career skills.

RECOMMENDATION 5
Support safe and diverse perspectives and research environments within institutional research programs.

RECOMMENDATION 6
Improve means to measure and share postdoctoral scholars’ career progression.

For FY11-present:
Collected demographic data for postdoctoral fellows
*Currently accessible via an internal dashboard*  
Ongoing efforts to track career paths of postdocs who have completed their training.  
*Preliminary report available at [https://doi.org/10.52519/00104](https://doi.org/10.52519/00104)*
Research Education & Training
The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

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myPDO Monthly: Maintaining Benefits for Postdocs on Independent Fellowships  
**Wednesday, February 7 | 1:00 p.m. ET**

This webinar will discuss current strategies for equitable benefit plans for postdocs regardless of funding source. Panelists will discuss what their campus does, background history about how policies were implemented, and what, if anything, will change given recent announcements from the National Institutes of Health. Notably, we will discuss the impact of the NIH notice in April 2023 stating that NRSA trainees and fellows should be provided with benefits consistent with what the institution provides others at similar career stages (full notice [here](#)), and December 2023 recommendations from NIH Advisory to the Committee to the Director on Re-envisioning NIH-Supported Postdoctoral Training (full report [here](#)). The session will conclude with Q&A from the audience.
Kathleen Flint Ehm, Ph.D., assistant dean for professional development and postdoctoral affairs, Graduate School, Stony Brook University

Ehm has twenty years’ experience in postdoctoral policy and professional development for doctorates. In her current role, she oversees professional development and educational initiatives for graduate students and postdocs. She also directs the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs, where in 2019 she served on a State University of New York (SUNY) effort that established a postdoc fringe rate and expanded benefits for postdocs across the multi-campus university system. She spent six years at the National Postdoctoral Association, serving as project manager for grant-funded initiatives. In this role, she was lead author on the NPA’s "Responsible Conduct of Research Toolkit" and From Ph.D. to Professoriate: The Role of the Institution in Fostering the Advancement of Postdoc Women. In 2004, she spent a year in residence at the National Science Foundation as an AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellow. She holds a doctorate in astronomy and astrophysics from the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a Bachelor of Science in math and astronomy from the University of Arizona.

Paolo Mangahas, Ph.D., MBA, director, Research Education & Training, The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center

Mangahas is at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, where he leads Research Education & Training, a department comprised of the Office for Postdoctoral Fellows, the Training Grants & Fellowships Office, and Recruitment & Special Programs. His responsibilities include coordinating existing and creating new research education and training programs, as well as measuring their impact and reporting outcomes. Mangahas serves on several institutional committees and taskforces and is involved in strategic decision making in trainee affairs, along with other leaders in Human Resources, Office of Sponsored Programs, Legal & Regulatory Affairs, and the Offices of the Chief Academic Officer and the Chief Scientific Officer. Mangahas holds a doctorate in biomedical sciences from Baylor College of Medicine, a Master of Business Administration in technology commercialization from the University of Alberta and is currently pursuing a master’s in educational psychology research and evaluation at the University of North Texas. He has over 15 years of experience at four different academic medical centers, working in research administration, financial and clinical reporting, department administration, operations management, and human resources.