

STUMBLE THROUGH THE JUNGLE

A NONLINEAR PATH TO
MEDICAL WRITING

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21 July 2021





OVERVIEW

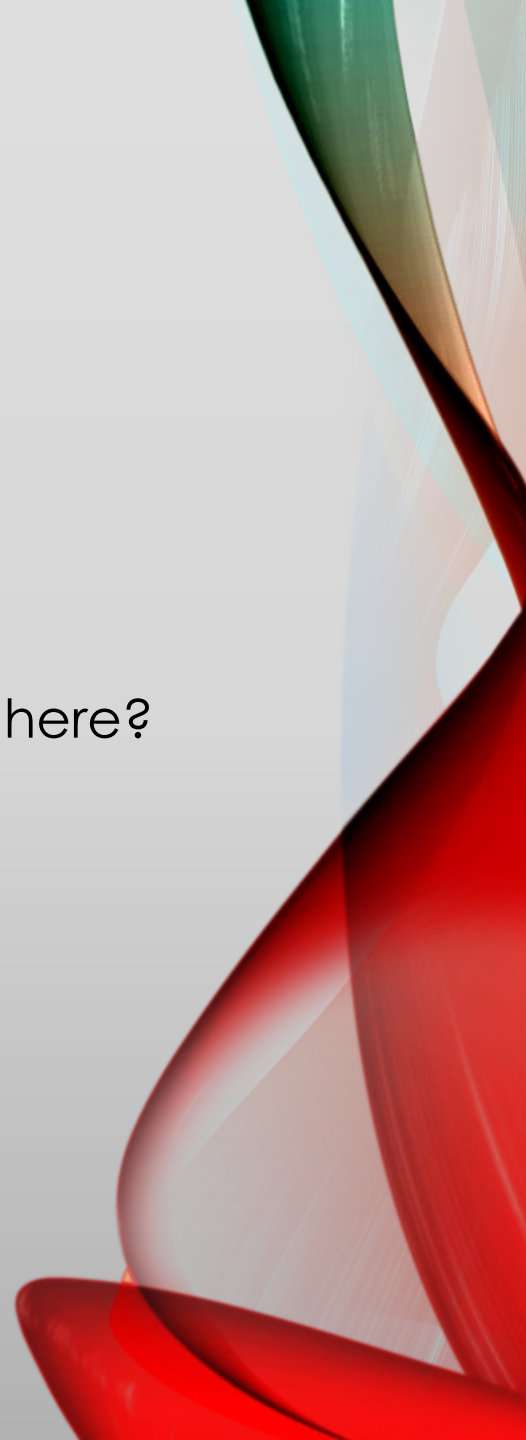
Nonlinear Careers: How did I get here?

Medical Writing Careers: How do I become a successful Medical Writer?

Summary: Lessons Learned and Q&A

NONLINEAR CAREERS

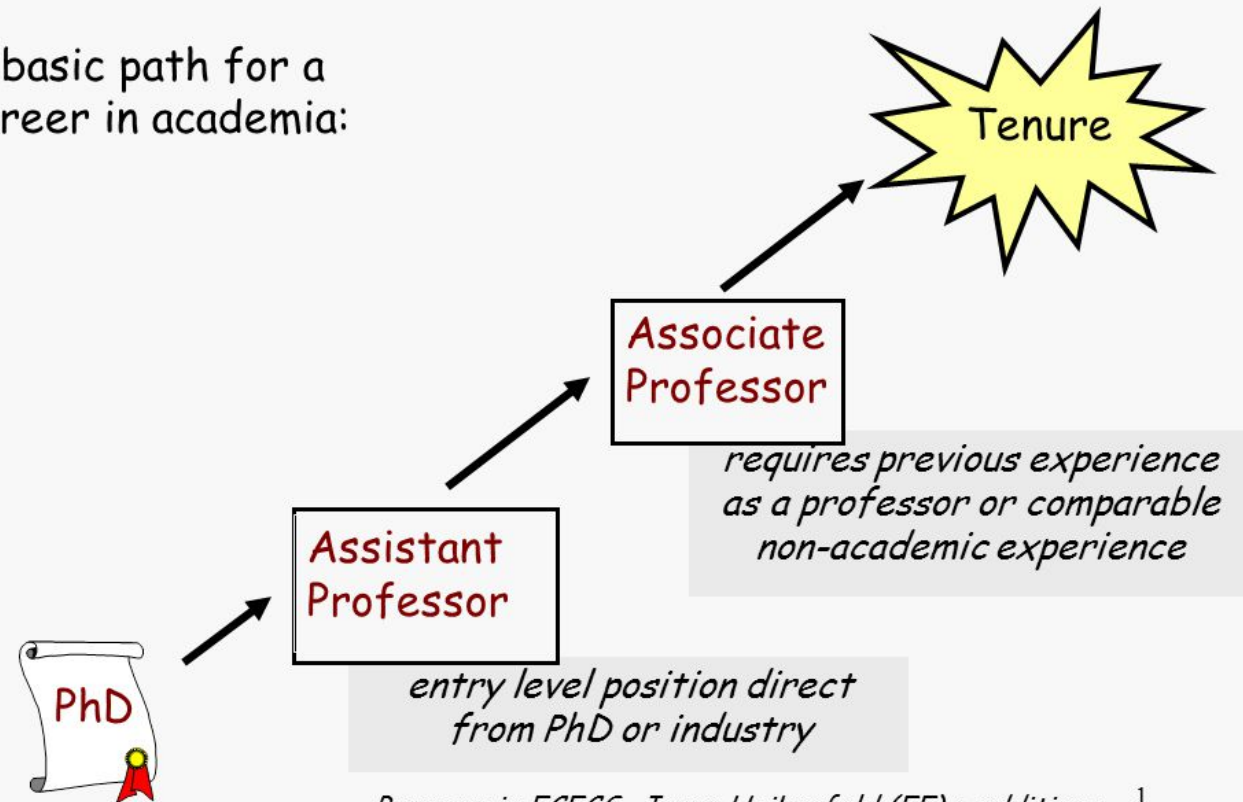
How did I get here?



TRADITIONAL MODELS OF PHD CAREER PATHS: LINEAR MODEL

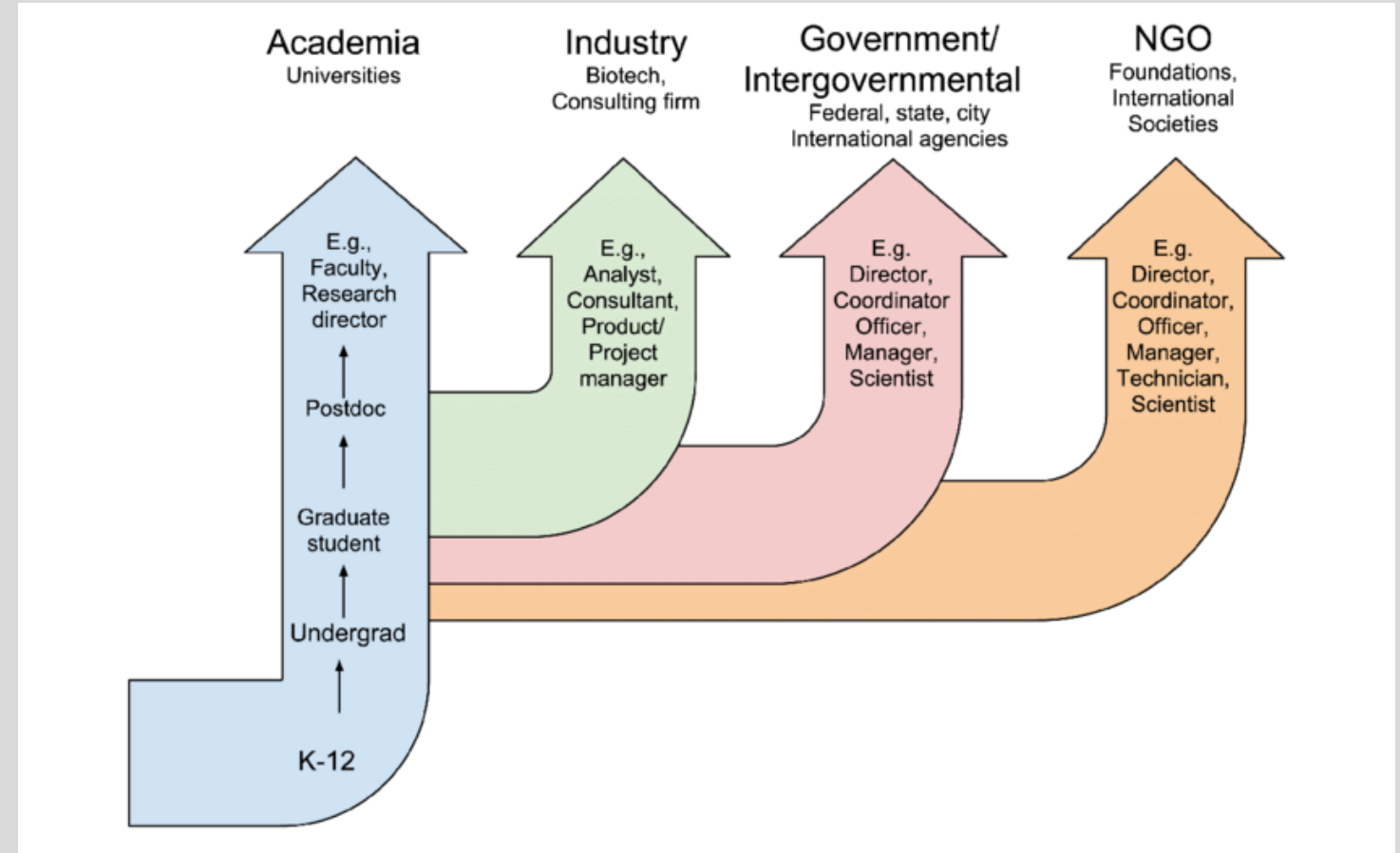
PFF...An Engineering Perspective

A basic path for a career in academia:

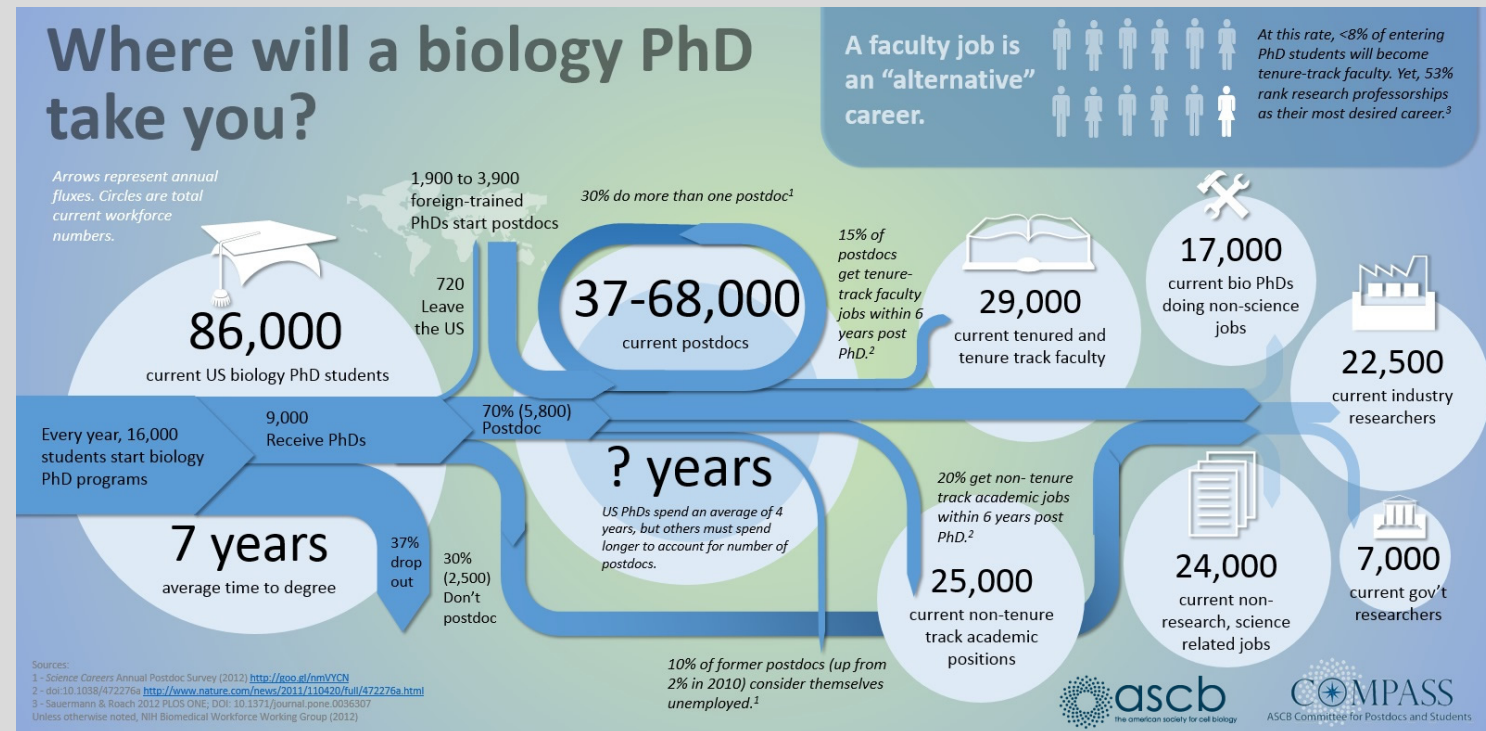


Program in ECECS...Jason Heikenfeld (EE) + additions ¹

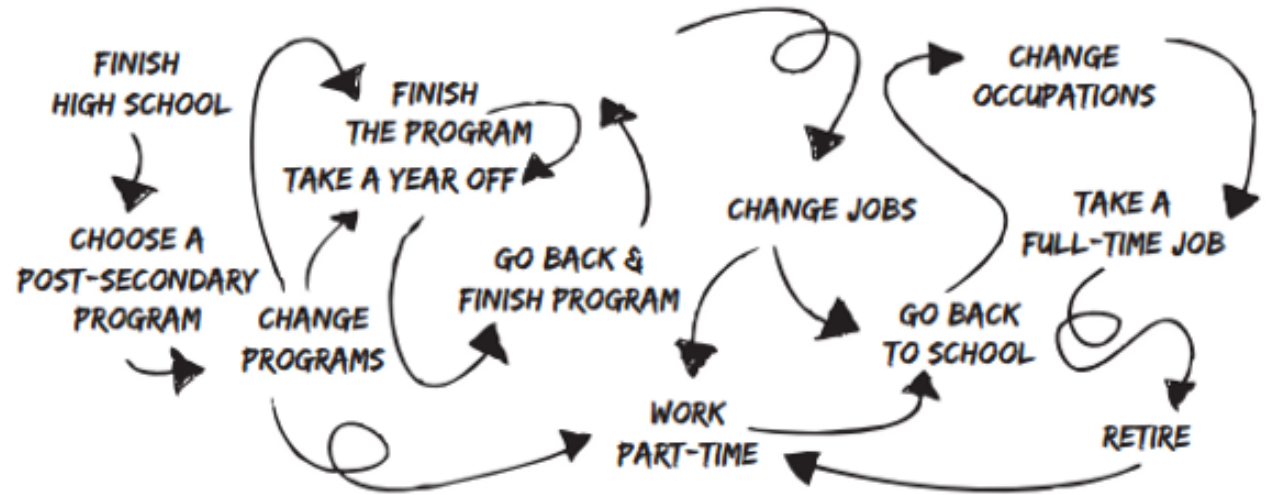
TRADITIONAL MODELS OF PHD CAREER PATHS: PIPELINE MODEL



TRADITIONAL MODELS OF PHD CAREER PATHS: PIPELINE MODEL



NONLINEAR CAREERS: WHAT REAL WORLD EVIDENCE SHOWS US



(This is Your Life, A Career and Education Planning Guide, Government of Alberta, page 3)

PEOPLE ARE NOT PATHWAYS

Life is messy

- Career needs change due to family structure, caretaking, health, geographic motility, etc.

Desired skillsets overlap greatly between job sectors

- Fundraising/budgeting, communication, analytical thought, project/program management, teamwork, leadership, etc.

Employer needs are rapidly changing

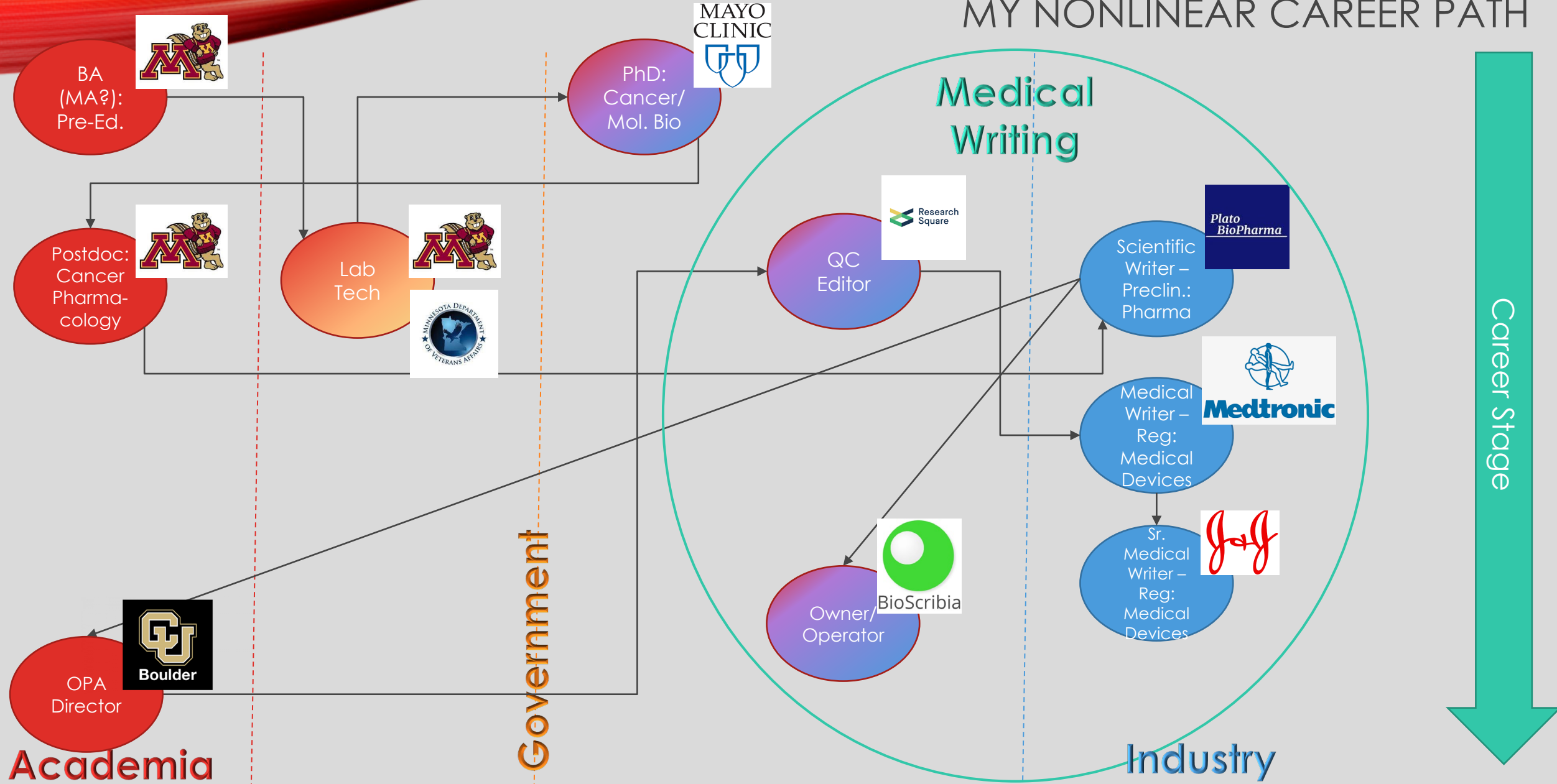
- Less-stable advancement pathways
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Advancing technology

Nonlinear careers are becoming the new normal

- “While the BLS estimates that baby boomers hold an average of 11 jobs during their working adulthood, millennials, many of whom entered the job market in the shadow of the Great Recession, might be on track to switch not only jobs but entire career trajectories at an even higher rate.”

WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?

MY NONLINEAR CAREER PATH



MEDICAL WRITING CAREERS

How do I become a
successful medical
writer?



BACK UP: WHAT IS A MEDICAL WRITER?

A group of careers

- Preclinical/Clinical – Study Reports, Manuscripts, Presentations, etc.
- Grantwriting
- Technical Writing – User Manuals, SOPs, Safety Documentation, etc.
- Regulatory – Performance/efficacy and safety evaluations for governing bodies (e.g., FDA, EU)
- Educational – CME materials for medical professionals

In any sector

- Industry – Tech, Pharma, Device
- Government
- Academia

With multiple advancement opportunities

- Regulatory Body Work
- Management/Executive Leadership
- Business Owner
- Grants Administration
- MSL

WHAT IS BEING A MEDICAL WRITER LIKE?

Being a medical writer

- I get to help people
- I get to be a geek
- I get to see the fruits of my labor within my lifetime (and usually in under a year)
- I have an independent schedule (in general)
- I have life-work balance (in general)

Working in industry

- The work is streamlined
- I have opportunities for skill/career development
- My results are frequent and tangible
- I have a team that wants to succeed together



WHAT SKILLS DO MEDICAL WRITERS NEED?

Skills Most People Think Medical Writers Have

Reading
Writing
Editing

Skills Medical Writers Really Have

Reading, Writing, and Editing
Adaptability
Analytical Skills
Attention to Detail
Collaborative Attitude
Creativity
Decision-Making
Multitasking
Strategic Thinking
Independent Capability
Project Management
Stakeholder Management
Time Management
Self-Learning
Ability to Handle Emails.....
A LOT of Emails

Geetika Choudhary 

THAT SEEMS LIKE A LOT.

Your doctoral and postdoctoral work prepare you for much of this

Independence

Multitasking and
time
management

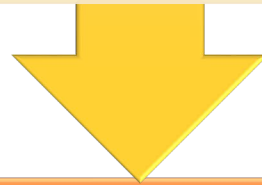
Analytical and
strategic thinking

Synthesizing
information from
data and written
sources

How to precisely
and accurately
present answers to
scientific questions

How to manage
expectations

...and probably
managing lots of
emails



And you can develop further in academia with a little extra effort

Collaboration and teamwork – work with
people outside your academic circles

Mentoring and leadership – ask for these
opportunities and have conversations with
other mentors

Writing and editing – help others with their
manuscripts; apply the AMA Manual of Style
to everything you write

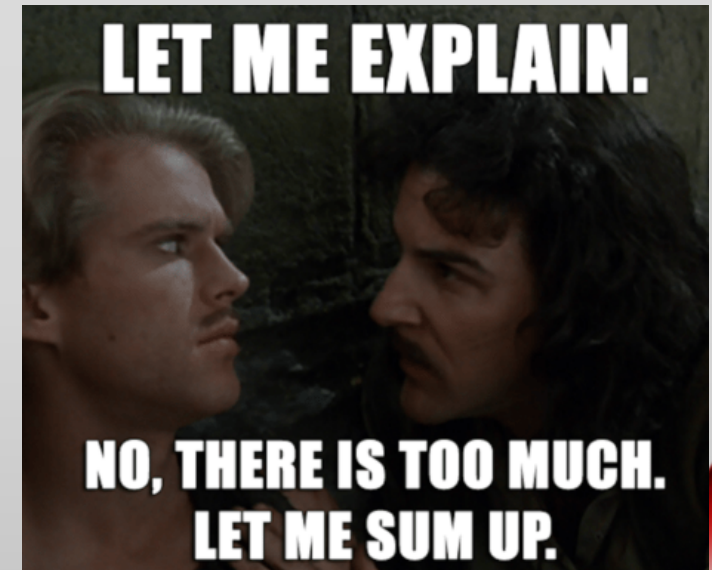
WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO PREPARE TO TRANSITION?

- Understand business communication and culture
 - Solution- and deliverable-oriented
 - Team-focused
 - Deadline-driven
 - [Email etiquette](#)
 - [Professional Communication](#)
- Learn basic project management skills
 - [Free course](#)
- Additional learning opportunities about medical writing careers and skills
 - Free: [Ultimate Guide to Becoming a Medical Writer](#); [AMWA blog](#)
 - Not Free: [AMWA online learning](#)

OK BUT HOW DO I FIND AN ACTUAL JOB?

- Look for entry-level jobs
 - Titles: medical writer, technical writer, scientific writer, editor, etc.
 - Good sites: Indeed, LinkedIn, AMWA jobs board
- Contract part-time for ESL editing companies
- Work your network
- Be patient
 - Entry-level industry jobs are few and far between
 - A job that includes an opportunity to develop writing further may be a good steppingstone (e.g., working in a grants office, a scientist role that involves writing study reports)
- Starting out independent is very difficult

SUMMARY



LESSONS LEARNED

- Believe in and take responsibility for growing yourself. No one cares about your career more than you do – not even your mom
- It's not always easy, but sometimes it is
- Industry gets a bad rap – any environment can be toxic
- Listen to your gut and pay attention to pink flags
- Setting boundaries is very important
- Feedback is essential, even when it's harsh

Q&A

CONTACT

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- Reference this talk so that I have context
- It may take me a few days to respond