BIOSCIENTIST
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Being a biomedical scientist: Danny Gaskin

Dimitrios Bitas

In this interview with Dimitrios Bitas, Danny shares his career path and useful advice to current Biomedical Science students.

Danny Gaskin, 28-year-old University of Salford alumnus from Accrington and an HCPC registered Biomedical Scientist. He completed his BSc Biomedical Science degree in 2018 and is currently employed as a Patient Blood Management Practitioner by NHS Blood and Transplant.

Could you describe your career path as a biomedical scientist? What were your steps after completing your degree?

Between the 2nd and 3rd year of my degree, I successfully completed a placement year in the Haematology department at Manchester Royal Infirmary. I graduated with a first-class honour's degree and the IBMS Certificate of Competency, allowing me to go straight into work as a BMS.

My career path started up in the lake district at Furness General Hospital, however, I didn't spend long there. An opportunity came up, and I moved down to the southwest and joined the haematology and transfusion team at Milton Keynes University Hospital. I absolutely loved my time there. I worked independently, got involved with all aspects of the quality management system, started my MSc degree, and overall, grew quickly as a scientist.

Being an ambitious person, my time in Milton Keynes didn't last long either. A new challenge to join the Pathology team at Spire Manchester Hospital came up. As my first post as a Senior BMS, I learned so much very quickly.

I left Spire roughly a year later to join NHS Blood and Transplant. I've learned something from the positives and negatives of everywhere I have worked. I look for a learning opportunity in every experience and I believe that's made me a better scientist and probably a better person.

Your CV shows that you switched courses and went from studying adult nursing to biomedical science. What changed your mind?

Before my biomedical science days, I studied Adult Nursing. The original plan was to train as an A&E nurse, but this only lasted about 18 months. During my first placement as a student nurse at the Haematology Day Unit at Manchester Royal Infirmary, I became fascinated by blood cells. I took up independent study on the different blood cells and the mechanisms that influence their production, replication, and destruction. I soon realised that a career in biomedical science was more suited to my interests.

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Can you tell us about your current job?

I am currently employed as a Patient Blood Management Practitioner by NHS Blood and Transplant. My job involves work on activities designed to support Patient Blood Management in hospitals across London. This includes provision of an on- going programme of support, education, audit, research, and specialist transfusion advice. One of the most important elements of my job is building relationships with other healthcare professionals involved in blood transfusion, to ensure a co-ordinated approach to improving transfusion laboratory and clinical practice locally, regionally, and nationally. "It's a job that I really enjoy and get huge satisfaction from. I work with the most talented team of scientists, nurses, administrators and doctors and we really make a positive difference every day.

What was your role as a biomedical scientist in haematology and blood transfusion like? Can you describe a typical week at work?

On a Monday, you might observe the presence of immature cells on a patient's peripheral blood smear that you're concerned might be indicative of a serious problem with the bone marrow, so you get in touch with the haematologist to escalate it. On Tuesday, you might be responding to major haemorrhage bleep to provide replacement blood for a patient that has been involved in an accident and lost a lot of blood. Wednesday might see you have to get the tools out and replace one of the probes on your analyser. Thursday might be a quiet day until you get the call from theatres to say that there had been some complications during childbirth and now a new mother is in desperate need of blood components. Thankfully, Friday is rest day.

What advice would you give to current biomedical science students? What steps would you recommend them to take?

Besides the obvious advice of working hard and putting the hours in, I would advise them to get involved with the university societies and the IBMS. Take advantage of as many opportunities as you can whilst you're a student. Some voluntary opportunities might first appear to be a lot of hard work for very little return, but there are transferable skills you can pull from any experience. Networking has had such a positive influence on my career to date. I'd suggest attending events, meetings and discussion groups. Build a social media presence. Make professional contacts and friends. Have fun and enjoy the process. Don't let these three or four years pass you by without having fun. I miss university so much.

What skills, abilities. And personal attributes are essential to succeed as a biomedical scientist?

Often when I see this question, I go on to read about how one must be bright, have attention to detail, be data driven etc. which are all true, but actually I think first a foremost you need to be compassionate. You need to be able to always keep at the forefront of your mind that every single sample belongs to a person with a family that loves them and that are probably worried about the results you're about to produce and report. You need to remember that every single task you perform in the laboratory, whether it's analytical or administrative, is essential to uphold the high quality necessary to provide the minimum level of care we should all be striving for. If you've got that, and a passion for biomedical science, everything else can be taught.

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How can other people help or affect someone's career? Were there any people who had a positive impact in your career development?

My career path has been enjoyable but very fast-paced. I've been lucky enough to meet some fantastic people in my career so far who have given me every opportunity to progress, and whether they have realised or not, they have helped me grow professionally and personally. Being surrounded by good people in a positive environment for learning is really important to me. I'll be forever grateful to Dr. Lucy Smyth and the University of Salford for the help and support required to switch and join the Biomedical Science programme. At Furness General Hospital I met Stephen McDonald, Ola Yahaya, and Shehz Abdullah, three really talented scientists who supported me through the haematology and transfusion basics. Stephen, Ola, and I still work closely together on a few different projects and Shehz and I speak most days. All three became friends for life. At Milton Keynes University Hospital I met some of the most knowledgeable and humble biomedical scientists and I learned so much so quickly.

You often talk about the value of networking, particularly through social media and what a significant role it has played in your own career. What would be your advice to a biomedical science student looking to start networking through Twitter for example?

There is a huge biomedical science community on Twitter. You can get involved with #IBMSChat and @WEBMScienitsts. Twitter is an immensely valuable tool for networking. I have met so many scientists on Twitter who have positively influenced my career in one way or another. Twitter and other social media platforms make the world so much more accessible. One thing I will say about Twitter is that it can sometimes feel like work from work. This is particularly true if you only follow biomedical science accounts and only engage with other scientists. Shutting off from work is important. Don't be afraid to be yourself on Twitter too. I don't believe that you should separate your personal and 'science' accounts. Not unless you want to, or your employer insists you should. I like that I can get to know the people behind the science, and I hope that people can get to know me too.

You can follow Danny on Twitter (@NHSDanny) for useful transfusion content, real-time football, and boxing punditry. Use #AskinGaskin for any questions. Danny is approachable and would love to hear from students and early career scientists.

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