

Invited Lecture 2

Career path or career portfolio? A journey from academia to digital health innovation

Fabiola Costa¹

¹ Sword Health Inc, Draper, UT, United States

* Correspondence: f.costa@swordhealth.com

Abstract

Background: In a world where professional trajectories are increasingly fluid, traditional career paths are being reshaped by individual passions, multidisciplinary skill sets, and emerging opportunities [1]. For many scientists, the journey beyond academia can feel uncertain or undefined. Yet, with the right tools, every experience—professional or personal—can contribute to a unique and fulfilling career portfolio. **Objective:** To share a personal journey from academic research to digital health innovation, reflecting on how a flexible, skills-based approach can unlock diverse career possibilities beyond the academic script. **Methods:** Drawing on over two decades of experience in research (from fundamental research, to translational research, pre-clinical, clinical trials and real-world evidence), leadership in funded innovation projects, and a more recent transition to the digital health industry, this lecture offers a narrative perspective on career development. Through storytelling and reflection, it highlights how building and combining skills—scientific, entrepreneurial, creative—can open new venues in both expected and unexpected settings. **Results:** The transition from academia to industry was not a departure, but a continuation of a purpose-driven path. This evolution illustrates how skills developed through research, teaching, mentorship, and even personal interests, can be powerful drivers of career transformation. **Conclusions:** Career journeys are often only coherent in hindsight. There is no universal script—but rather, a mosaic of experiences that, when linked thoughtfully, create a compelling and impactful career portfolio. By embracing experimentation, leaning into curiosity, and valuing both professional and personal growth, we can empower ourselves—and the next generation—to redefine success in science and beyond.

Keywords: career in science; translational innovation; digital health

Acknowledgments/Funding

Not applicable.

References

1. Woolston, C. PhD careers: Industry overtakes academia. *Nature* **2023**, *617*, 669–671, doi: 10.1038/d41586-023-01710-w.



In *Scientific Letters*, works are published under a CC-BY license (Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), the most open license available. The users can share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially), as long as they give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made (read the full text of the license terms and conditions of use at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>).