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You Are Only As Good As Your Last Question

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You Are Only As Good As Your Last Question

Joseph A. Zullo, Liz Newman

Using the scientific method for discovery is all at once exciting and terrifying. The process does not invite huge leaps, but instead reveals small amounts of information that piece-by-piece pushes the boundaries of our collective understandings of both medicine and science. Faithfully adhering to the scientific approach requires work, patience, and above all, questions.

The inclusiveness of American science is a critical factor in its exceptional quality. A diversity of points of view is conducive to a wide variety of interests and, with the advent of online databases, science has become more accessible to more people. Reviewing the literature is the first step to any original investigation and is now the easiest it has ever been in our nation's history for anyone with curiosity and Internet access.

A recent conversation with a young Harvard professor illustrates this modern development in research: how did he think he could compete with established scientists in a field that he suddenly decided to enter? Many young medical students considering a career in translational research, across the country and within our own classrooms, echo this feeling of trepidation. He spoke with confidence and conviction when he answered that he could learn any field in 6 months, alluding to the ease with which anyone can access practically every experiment published. Obviously other traits contributed to him becoming an outstanding physician-scientist, but none of his ambition, creativity, or communication abilities could ever replace the impact of reading the literature.

Once you successfully generate questions and ideas from a deep understanding of the literature you stand at the cusp of your personal understanding and often the collective understanding of the scientific community.

A strong community of scientists and trainees, like those that can be found here at New York Medical College, actively channels these ideas into inquiries through collaboration and trust. A unique advantage at our medical college is the willingness of laboratories to take in medical students and help translate their medical education into scientific understanding. The Medical Student Research Forum and Graduate Student Research Forum best exemplify the impact and strong contribution to science by students at New York Medical College. All the participants at these research forums push our current understanding of our most pressing medical needs, which include new screening tools for kidney disease, innovative pharmacological treatments for resistant bacteria, different mechanisms to prevent hypertension, and novel cancer screening methods. With the partnership between medical students, graduate students and faculty, we have an opportunity to generate exciting and important research that has implications far beyond the laboratory or the exam table.

To summarize, reading the scientific literature helps bring into focus new horizons and offers a valuable perspective of our past. As stated by Sir Isaac Newton, "If I have seen further, it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants." To make a difference we need to work together, across disciplines and training, to advance towards a better future.

Feeling Innervation

Talia Malekan

