



Dr. Sebastian D. Parlee

Senior Scientist, Biology – Novo Nordisk

Written by Brendan McKeown, Ph.D. Trainee



Dr. Sebastian D. Parlee is a Senior Scientist with the Biology Division of Novo Nordisk Research Centre Indianapolis. He completed his undergraduate and subsequent graduate degree at Dalhousie University; studying the effects of tumor necrosis factor- α on adipose-derived chemerin production and bioactivation guided by Dr. Kerry Goralski. Following graduation from his PhD, Sebastian began postdoctoral training at the University of Michigan guided by Dr. Ormond A. MacDougald. Here he continued to follow his primary interest in metabolism focusing on novel receptors regulating adipogenesis as well as collaborating on projects relating to bone marrow and maternal health. Throughout Sebastian's education he knew that he was setting himself up for a future in industry rather than academia and by the third year of his postdoc he had begun interviewing within different companies.

After a friend and colleague from Michigan took a position with Novo Nordisk, Sebastian was invited to speak at their Seattle Research Site in November of 2015 and interview for a position within the company. Unbeknownst to Sebastian at the same time a new Novo Nordisk research facility was being opened in Indianapolis. This ground-breaking new facility, consisting of ~20 PhDs, would be working both collaboratively and independently as a Translational Research Unit pushing the boundaries of medicinal chemistry and pharmacology. Sebastian began working for this site in June of 2016. He



and his medicinal chemist and biologist colleagues work at the benchtop conducting experiments and collaborating on research under supervision of the Vice President Dr. Richard DiMarchi. Sebastian describes this model as being “self-guided with oversight.” By working in his laboratory as the day-to-day scientist, Sebastian can run the project in a much more personal and creative manner. In this way he is able to monitor all aspects of the scientific results which lead to fundamental discoveries.

Sebastian’s future goals are to continue growing as a researcher and developing his projects with an eye toward an eventual cure for both diabetes and obesity. He equally hopes to continue to grow personally and professionally within Novo Nordisk and notes that “There is always a tonne to learn about the business of science.” He is particularly proud of the benefits that have come from working alongside such brilliant medicinal chemists, as this is an area of interest to him where he has had little previous experience.

The advice Sebastian offers to young scientists is to be willing to move to find opportunity, and to be a good team member. “An important part of success is who you interact and collaborate with,” he mentions, “as future opportunities often come from word of mouth”. This means branching out and opening yourself up to these opportunities. For this reason, he advises to go to conferences, visit labs, and interact with as many researchers as you can. This too can, and should, involve changing geographic location throughout your career. In this way, he points out, you can gain as much experience, knowledge and diversity of thought from multiple laboratory groups at different institutions and in different countries. He emphasises, additionally, that the ability to be a good colleague is indispensable throughout your career because much more progress can be made by being a trusted member of a research team.