

## Dr. Siawash Ahmar

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Dr. Ahmar started his academic career at Western University in chemistry and biochemistry where he worked on a fourth-year research project focused on the synthesis of nanoparticles and discovered an interest in inorganic chemistry. After a good experience with the Corrigan lab he continued on with his master's thesis. He had a difficult start to his graduate studies, so he took some time away from academia before starting a PhD in organic chemistry at the University of Waterloo. He transitioned into a postdoctoral fellowship with the Gunning lab at the University of Toronto working in the field of medical chemistry. His project had commercial value and a start-up company, Dalriada Therapeutics, continued the project. Dr. Ahmar was approached to continue his work and provide expertise, providing him the opportunity to move to industry.

Dalriada Therapeutics is a young, growing company in Mississauga, ON, that is focused on drug discovery and preclinical development of novel small molecule cancer treatments. The company also designs and builds custom molecular libraries for client assays. As a Senior Scientist, Dr. Ahmar had reporting lines to both the CEO and the Director of R&D and works closely with them in developing projects. One of his roles is connecting the groups of researchers to upper management and making sure projects run smoothly, facilitating communications for problem solving and project goals. As this is a young company it expects its employees to be multidisciplinary. Dr. Ahmar



manages multiple projects in both R&D and in client services. While most of his work is as a scientist, analyst, and project designer, he has also needed to learn many aspects of business. These include big picture experiences, such as being part of building a new business and expanding it, and well as smaller scale practical skills of dealing with invoices and customer quotes. This required non-scientific skills such as customer communications, quoting, and large-scale project management. Dr. Ahmar stressed the importance of team communication for the purposes of sharing ideas and collaborating within the workplace to keep projects moving through group problem solving.

When asked what he liked most about his current position, Dr. Ahmar stated that he likes not knowing what will happen or come of new projects. He enjoys the unknown of research as well as coming up with ideas and testing them, looking for answers. His PhD project had been heavily geared towards methods development. This type of research was difficult to explain or relate to the general public. Now with Dalriada he has the opportunity to communicate about important project. A third reason why he likes his current job, and his experience in industry as a whole, has been the opportunity to work with other experienced scientists and researchers of various disciplines. While in academia there was a constant stream of students learning how to work in a lab, perform various experiments and techniques, and manage their individual projects. In his current position he works with other more experienced researchers, which increases project efficiency and allows for the generation of more ideas. The location of the lab is what Dr. Ahmar likes least about his current position as the Dalriada research lab is still based out of the Gunning lab. This results in a cramped work area with both the industry and academic labs in the same space, as well as the added difficulty of trying to control the separation of equipment and materials between company and students.

Dr. Ahmar stated that he misses the curiosity of academia the most. Answers to questions can be more freely pursued, with the chance to develop ideas and troubleshoot more tenaciously, whereas industry can't focus too long on projects that are not working. He wishes he had discovered his passion for natural products over methodology sooner and that he could have specialized into biotechnology when he



was still a student. One of the most important decisions professionally was joining Dr. Patrick Gunning's group. Until the opportunity to work with Dalriada was offered, he had planned to stay in academia, but this experience has shown him that he likes the medical chemistry approach to problem solving.

Dr. Ahmar's suggestions for graduate students looking to get into industry in the future include getting started on networking. Students should ask questions of people with different academic backgrounds and in different industry positions about their path and current professions. Branching out into a business background would also be very helpful in diversifying our expertise and would open up more possible positions in industry. We as students should try to find what we are most interested in and build upon these ideas when looking for our passions. We should be flexible when it comes to the job market and be willing to try jobs that are different from our current goals. This will allow us to experience a range of positions that might actually change where we want to get to in our careers. There are many possible paths to a job where we will be satisfied.