

ISH COMMITTEE, PARTNER AND AFFILIATED SOCIETY REPORTS

ISH global career journeys: transitioning to independence and the role of mentorship

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The International Society of Hypertension (ISH) Global Career Journeys video series was an initiative of the Mentorship and Training Committee (MTC), recorded by Dr. Mariane Bertagnolli, who served as a committee member from 2022 to 2024. The goal of this series was to provide a resource of personal narratives from ISH early-career researchers across diverse regions, sharing their experiences during the transition to independence and their reflections on how mentorship supported, or could have better supported, their journey. The series also aimed to raise awareness among ISH members about significant cultural differences and inequities in academia, the various barriers faced by early-career researchers, and the vital role of international societies such as ISH, as sources of confidence and support throughout this process.

Through interviews recorded during the 2024 ISH World Congress in Cartagena, Colombia, featuring scientists from Mozambique, the UK, Greece, Chile, Australia, and Brazil, the series published on the ISH YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@ISHBP>) explored the transition from MD/PhD training to independent research careers. It highlighted the barriers and facilitators encountered along the way, and emphasized the critical role of mentorship in shaping these journeys. This report seeks to synthesize those

narratives, focusing on key challenges, facilitators, and the impact of mentorship across different global contexts.

Transitioning from MD/PhD to Independent Scientist

The transition from MD/PhD training to becoming an independent scientist varies significantly across global contexts, as illustrated by the experiences of six researchers interviewed in 2024. In resource-limited settings like Mozambique, Brazil, and Chile, Drs. Neusa Jessen, Michele Mazzaron de Castro, and Patricio Araos Salas faced structural challenges such as limited funding, infrastructure, and institutional support. Their paths were shaped by the need to balance clinical or teaching duties with research ambitions, and both emphasized the critical role of international mentorship and collaboration in overcoming local constraints. Similarly, Dr. Konstantinos Kyriakoulis in Greece encountered bureaucratic and financial hurdles despite strong academic preparation, relying on global networks to guide and advance his career.

In contrast, researchers in more structured environments like the UK and Australia, represented by Drs. Karla Neves and Dean Picone, benefited from clear postdoctoral pathways, national funding schemes, and supportive institutional cultures.



Their transitions were facilitated by strategic planning and access to mentorship, although they still faced pressures related to publishing and grant acquisition. Dr. de Castro's experience in Brazil highlighted a hybrid reality: institutional instability and funding limitations were offset by resilience and international engagement. Across all cases, mentorship and global networking emerged as common facilitators, while disparities in infrastructure, funding, and systemic support defined the challenges unique to each region.

Transition Barriers and Facilitators

The recordings reveal that while all participants faced barriers in their transition to independent research careers, the nature and intensity of these challenges varied significantly by region. In countries like Mozambique, Greece, Chile, and Brazil, funding limitations were a major obstacle, often added by institutional instability and frequent policy shifts. These conditions created uncertainty and hindered long-term planning, making it difficult for early-career researchers to secure stable research positions

and structure or to launch independent projects. Additionally, a lack of local mentorship in these regions, particularly where research or academic cultures are still developing, left many scientists without the guidance needed to navigate complex academic systems. In contrast, researchers in the UK and Australia experienced more structured and supportive environments. Institutional frameworks, clear career pathways, and access to national funding schemes facilitated smoother transitions. However, even in these contexts, the pressure to publish and secure competitive grants remained a significant stressor.

Across all regions, international collaboration emerged as a vital facilitator, providing access to mentorship, resources, and visibility. Personal resilience, adaptability, and strategic networking were consistently highlighted as essential traits for overcoming systemic barriers. Regional differences also flag the uneven trajectories to independence in global research environments and the critical role of international networks in bridging gaps for scientists, particularly in under-resourced settings.

Figure 1



The Role of Mentorship

Mentorship played a pivotal role in shaping the career trajectories of all the researchers interviewed, serving not only as a source of strategic guidance but also as emotional and professional support. Generally, participants agreed that mentors helped clarify research goals, navigate complex funding landscapes, and build visibility through international networks. This support was especially crucial during moments of uncertainty or institutional instability, offering reassurance and direction. For example, Dr. Neusa Jessen from Mozambique highlighted how mentorship helped her overcome professional isolation and connect with global collaborators, while Dr. Karla Neves in the UK benefited from mentors who helped her align with institutional expectations and refine her research focus.

Differences in Mentorship Culture

Our recordings showed that mentorship cultures varied widely across regions, reflecting broader disparities in academic infrastructure. In the UK and Australia, mentorship was formalized through institutional programs, regular evaluations, and integration into career development frameworks. These systems provided consistent guidance and accountability. In contrast, Mozambique and Brazil relied heavily on informal mentorship, often facilitated through international networks due to a lack of mentorship among senior researchers locally. Greece and Chile occupied a middle ground, where mentorship was valued but lacked consistent structure, prompting many researchers to seek support through global initiatives like ISH or professional societies.

Across all interviews, the concept and role of mentorship varied significantly across academic cultures. In the UK and Australia, trainees and early-career investigators are often supported by formal mentorship programs that operate independently of their research teams or supervisors. In contrast, in Mozambique, Chile, Brazil, and Greece, mentorship is still closely tied to supervision, typically provided by clinical or research supervisors. These disparities reflect a broader lack of consensus on the definition and value of mentorship globally, highlighting the need for clearer frameworks and culturally responsive approaches in international mentorship initiatives.

Common Supportive Aspects of Mentorship

Despite these cultural differences, the core functions of mentorship were generally appreciated. Across all narratives, mentors played a crucial role in career guidance, helping mentees set strategic goals and navigate complex academic systems. They also supported skill development in areas such as grant writing and publishing, while fostering professional networks and providing emotional encouragement. Mentors were often described as role models who inspired confidence and ambition, highlighting the multiple nature of effective mentorship.

The interviews also underscored several key elements that make mentorship impactful in shaping global research careers. Accessibility and responsiveness were vital, ensuring mentees felt supported and guided. Strategic insight into the research landscape helped mentees make knowledgeable decisions, while empowerment through encouragement of independence and leadership fostered long-term growth. Importantly, mentors who facilitated global networking opened doors to international collaborations and resources. Programs like the ISH MTC were especially valuable in bridging gaps for researchers in low-resource settings, offering structured support and enhancing outreach on the global stage.

Conclusion

The ISH Global Career Journeys video series offered a rich exploration of the diverse pathways researchers navigate in their transition to independence. By capturing voices from across continents, the series highlighted both shared challenges such as the pressure to publish and secure funding, and region-specific barriers like institutional instability and limited mentorship access. These insights emphasise the global importance of mentorship, international collaboration, and personal resilience in overcoming systemic hurdles and building sustainable research careers.

Importantly, the series provides valuable guidance for shaping future international mentorship programs and ISH initiatives. By identifying the structural disparities and showcasing the transformative impact of global networks and

mentorship, it offers a roadmap for targeted support as described in Figure 1. The experiences shared by participants reinforce the need for inclusive, accessible, and strategically designed mentorship frameworks, particularly for early-career researchers in low-resource settings where global organizations like ISH can play a pivotal role in fostering equity, outreach, and long-term success for emerging scientists worldwide.

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