

INTRODUCTION TO THE MEDICAL RESEARCHER PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY

Problem 1. Our postdoctoral fellowship policy mandates that at the end of five years postdoctoral fellows must transition into a different position or job title. The options are:

- 1) Move to another institution as a post doctoral fellow
- 2) Move to another institution as an assistant professor
- 3) Be appointed at UCHC as an Assistant Professor in Residence in either the Investigator or Clinician-Investigator professional category. These categories are time limited and require promotion.
- 4) Be appointed at UCHC as in a technical capacity such as a Research Associate.

While many fellows choose options 1 and 2, there are researchers who would choose to remain at the Health Center. The choice between options 3 and 4 is a choice between a faculty position and a technical position. Although in some cases, it may be appropriate for the researcher to be appointed as a research associate, this is not always the case when the individual makes substantial academic contributions to research and teaching as a member of a research group or a collaborative research project.

Problem 2. In some cases, researchers appointed as Assistant Professor in Residence in the investigator or clinician-investigator category may not be sufficiently “independent,” yet they contribute substantially to the overall research effort here at UCHC. These individuals may be essential for collaborative research efforts. Since Assistant Professors in Residence in the Investigator category have a mandatory up or out promotion clock, many of these individuals will be asked to leave.

These individuals can be identified as experienced researchers who are not a PI on a research grant and may not have their own laboratory space. However, they play very important roles in the research endeavor in several ways: 1) they mentor and teach primarily in the laboratory; 2) they produce high quality, publishable data; 3) they are essential for collaborative research; 4) they are co-author on high quality publications of research findings; and 5) they qualify as members of a Masters or PhD graduate program.

If a research is appointed as Assistant professors in residence, the Investigator path requires independence from the postdoctoral mentor. Each year the academic merit plan judges Assistant Professors in Residence in the Investigator category by the same standards that it judges tenure track researchers. Consequently, these In Residence Investigators are being set up to fail.

In the current funding environment, achieving actual financial independence as a PI is very difficult. The types of grants are quite restricted for recent postdoctoral fellows transitioning to Assistant Professor. The most plausible are the mentored research grants such as R03 and K awards; however mentoring itself implies a lack of independence. Recent postdoctoral fellows may not be competitive for an R01 especially while they are still in the PI's laboratory, and a NIH study section might question whether the individual is truly independent of the PI of the lab.

In the current fiscal environment at UCHC, receiving separate laboratory space may be problematic. Research space is limited. If an Assistant Professor in Residence in the investigator or clinician-investigator category is not granted separate lab space by his or her department, the researcher is marked by the appearance of not being independent even if it is not the case.

Thus, the existing options for the researchers In Residence are inadequate. To remedy this situation, we propose a new professional category, the **Medical Researcher**. This category allows the initial appointment at the Assistant Professor level in Residence and does not require mandatory promotion or termination. It does not require that the individual have their own laboratory or be PI on a grant although they may qualify if they do so. However, it does require that they:

- 1) Have an advanced degree and have completed training.
- 2) Demonstrate autonomous function in their academic role.
- 3) Contribute meaningfully to the academic missions of the Health Center.

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