

PATH TO THE PODIUM

Editorially independent content supported by



Arjan Hura, MD; Brian Shafer, MD; Erin Sieck, MD; and Nandini Venkateswaran, MD

Speaking at meetings, presenting data, and talking on behalf of industry has very real potential to open doors and propel the speaker down new career paths. The question is, how do you get there? What are the first steps? And what are the pitfalls to avoid?

To help answer these questions, YoungMD Connect recently hosted its second "Path to the Podium"

workshop. Although back by popular demand, this installment featured a twist: Each panelist, Arjan Hura, MD; Brian Shafer, MD; Erin Sieck, MD; and Nandini Venkateswaran, MD, is a former YMDC Beta Member, and is now a highly sought-after speaker.

In the following, the faculty share their thoughts on how young ophthalmologists can start to carve a role

for themselves as thought leaders and presenters at meetings and conferences. Overall, they said that there is no specific path to the podium that will be right for everyone, but there is certainly ample opportunity for those in training and early in their careers to practice the skills necessary to become more proficient at presenting and speaking in public.



POSITIONING YOURSELF DURING RESIDENCY & FELLOWSHIP

Arjan Hura, MD

"Focus on becoming the best ophthalmologist you can be. Becoming a great speaker will come in time."

- The time you spend in formal training is supposed to be about becoming the best ophthalmologist you can be. If you do that, people will want to work with you.
 - With that in mind, don't be afraid to say no to opportunities that will interfere with your training—make building your clinical skills the priority.
 - Similarly, don't feel like you have to say yes to everything—you want to set yourself up for success, so think about passing if you can't give your best effort.
- Practice comes in many forms. When you are teaching peers or presenting cases, you are actively practicing public speaking! Think about how successful you were in each of these instances and refine your oration accordingly.
 - The biggest tip I can offer is to lessen your fear of public speaking. Practice, practice, practice!
 - Study people who are good speakers and emulate the characteristics you like, but be sure to stay true to who you are as a person. Incongruity is a surefire way to turn off the audience.
- The easiest path to the podium is through research. It's a great way to get noticed if you execute properly, and smaller meetings afford opportunities that are just as valuable as the big national meetings. In fact, the smaller meetings are great places to practice.
 - Meetings like ME Live offer a plethora of opportunities for younger ophthalmologists to present and be involved. Seize the opportunity when it's presented, and don't be discouraged if you are not handed the world right away.



USING YOUR NETWORK AND RESOURCES

Nandini Venkateswaran, MD

"Everyone you meet in ophthalmology is someone you want to get to know well. It's a small world. Even as a first-year resident, you never know who is going to help you one day."

- Networking is about making connections, but even that can come in many forms. In any network, there will be people who can help get you the opportunities you want. You will also have mentors and cheerleaders. And then there are the connectors who facilitate introductions—to the people who can land you speaking gigs, to new mentors, and to colleagues with similar interests.
 - Industry representatives and contacts are important connectors. They might get you right to the podium, but they are also in touch with the people in their companies who make those assignments.
 - As you think about mentors in your network, think beyond the people who can guide you in training. Your peers can be mentors, as well. At a very basic level, a mentor possesses a trait you find admirable, something you want to learn or adopt.
- How do you approach industry? By being genuinely enthusiastic about your interests and about trying new technology.
- Speaking and presenting are skills, and just like anything else you want to be proficient in, these require practice and dedication to training.
 - Attending workshops on public speaking is a great idea. You can practice what you learn during Grand Rounds and in training settings with junior colleagues.
 - Joining national committees is an opportunity to be part of symposia planning, and thus, gets you a step closer to the podium.



PODIUM OPPORTUNITIES IN PRIVATE PRACTICE

Brian Shafer, MD

"Determine first if you really want to go down this pathway, because while it can be very rewarding, it can come at a cost."

- Presenting at meetings and speaking on behalf of companies can be rewarding, both professionally and personally. But any commitment comes with a necessary sacrifice. The first step in being successful is to truly sit with yourself and determine if this is a path you want to pursue.
 - Podium opportunities should be FUN! If you think you won't enjoy it, don't do it.
- You will never regret pouring more time into your practice and your home. The speaking opportunities will always be there.
- Your contacts in industry are a great place to start exploring potential speaking opportunities. Let them know your interest and be ready to listen to feedback.
 - Being involved in research is a great first step on the path to the podium. Large-scale clinical trials offer a plethora of opportunity in this regard, but delivering public data readouts may not be accessible to younger ophthalmologists. At the other end of the spectrum are Investigator-Initiated Trials, and they are a great foray into the world of research. Of course, tracking your personal outcomes is the first step in doing any type of research.



SUCCESS AT THE PODIUM

Erin Sieck, MD

"The way to make a good first impression is to be on your A-game."

- Know your material cold. Dig into the references you use. Whenever you present at a meeting, expect to be challenged.
 - When you know the material, you will also be perceived as an expert, and that is how you can impress people.
- Because first impressions are important, set yourself up for success—don't be afraid to say no if you can't fully commit or if you don't think you can do the job well.
- Even if you can't say yes to the opportunity, see if there is a way if you can still participate. Doing something small to assist will keep you engaged and may lead to future opportunities. Can you help with slide prep? Can you offer to review the material? Collect data? Provide editorial support?
- Take meetings with industry when they present themselves. Don't take meetings at the expense of other priorities, but don't overlook them when timing permits.
- Did I mention that when you speak in public you should know your material inside and out? It really is that important.