The thick milky white appearance of the urine is highly suggestive of chyluria. Upon standing, the urine may eventually separate into 3 layers: a top layer of chylomicrons, a middle layer rich in protein, and a bottom layer containing fibrin clots and cellular debris (1). The most common cause of chyluria is lymphatic filariasis, a parasitic disease considered endemic in tropical and subtropical regions. Lymphatic obstruction leads to formation of a lymphaticourinary fistula, causing excretion of chyle into the urinary tract. In this patient, quantification of urine triglycerides, cholesterol, and lipoprotein electrophoresis confirmed the appearance of chylomicrons in the urine. Alternatively, chylomicrons can be extracted with chloroform or ether. The triglyceride-rich lipids should not affect urine dipstick or automated urinalysis results, and chylomicrons exhibiting Brownian motion may be visible by manual microscopy. After renal pelvic sclerotherapy, most patients become symptom free. Recurrence is noted in 15% to 20% of cases, and that may require laparoscopic surgical correction (1, 2).

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Now That Your Foot Is in the Door, Don’t Put It in Your Mouth

Christopher R. McCudden1* and Carmen L. Wiley2

In a previous article, we reviewed some of the key factors that postdoctoral candidates should do and avoid to secure an interview in a laboratory for a postdoctoral position (1). In this follow-up article, we asked successful Clinical Chemistry fellows and Commission on Accreditation in Clinical Chemistry (ComACC)3 program directors questions to supplement common-sense approaches to handling phone and in-person interviews for fellowship candidates and early-career professionals seeking their first “real” job.

The interviews consisted of 11 open-ended questions that were intended to capture the expectations of potential employers, the preparation necessary for an interview, and some questions that interviewees might expect to encounter. The ComACC program directors included the 2003 AACC president, Dr. Thomas Moyer; the 2010 AACC president, Dr. Catherine

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3 Nonstandard abbreviations: ComACC, Commission on Accreditation in Clinical Chemistry; SYCL, Society for Young Clinical Laboratorians.
Hammett-Stabler; the 2011 AACC president, Dr. Ann Gronowski; and recently elected AACC board member Dr. David Grenache. Dr. Nader Rifai, Editor-in-Chief of Clinical Chemistry, also offered some helpful advice. Successful interviewees included SYCL (Society for Young Clinical Laboratorians) members Dr. Steven Cotten, Dr. Mark Cervinski, and Dr. Laura Parnas. The questions were divided into 4 categories: preparation, during the interview, postinterview follow-up, and faux pas to avoid (Table 1).

Phone Interview

To prepare, successful interviewees all indicated that job seekers should know as much as they can about the place where they are interviewing and the people interviewing them. Applicants should read the job description thoroughly; if it indicates that a particularly specialty is required, then this specialty will indeed be required. Dr. Hammett-Stabler, Director of Clinical Chemistry, University of North Carolina, advises when applying for a job to “go to department’s or business’s web site and learn about it. Make sure you are going to be interested in doing the described job. Most importantly, do this before applying. Don’t waste your time or theirs if you really aren’t qualified or interested in the job as described.” There was a consensus among successful interviewees that as part of the preparation, people should identify an appropriate location to speak to the potential employer that is free of noise and distractions. Dr. Steve Cotten, postdoctoral fellow at the University of North Carolina, writes, “Having a designated space that is free of distractions and noise helps me to focus on the interview questions, listen closely to the interviewer, and formulate responses while maintaining a relaxed state of mind.” This focus will be conveyed in the interview; employers do not want to strain to hear responses in a background of traffic or barking dogs.

Respondents stated repeatedly that candidates should be themselves during the phone interview and not try to say what they think the employer wants to hear. An important consideration during the phone interview is the lack of visual cues. From the interviewer’s perspective, it can be difficult to tell if the interviewee understands what is being said or asked and whether the candidate is engaged in the process. Silence may be interpreted as disinterest or confusion, and interruptions may be considered rude or arrogant. Candidates should take the time to clarify questions as necessary and clearly communicate to the interviewer that they are interested and engaged. Most jobs and training programs in laboratory medicine require phone consultations. It is therefore essential for candidates to show that they can communicate effectively on the phone. During a phone interview, candidates can expect to be asked why they are interested in the position, to describe themselves, and to discuss their previous research experience. According to Dr. Ann Gronowski, Associate Medical Director, Washington University, “The candidate should be able to articulate what they like and what they don’t like in science. It’s OK not to really know what exact area of laboratory medicine you might want to go into—it’s too early. But you should be able to say what general areas you enjoy and don’t enjoy.”

After the interview, a simple written thank-you note or e-mail message is an appropriate way to indicate appreciation for the opportunity. Additional references or other relevant material that came up during the process may also be communicated during the follow-up.

In-Person Interview

After a successful phone interview, a candidate may be asked to visit the facility for a formal in-person interview. Anyone going for an in-person interview should be thoroughly prepared and be ready to discuss in detail anything listed on their curriculum vitae. Job seek-
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Interviews, staff, and patients also may be allergic to some fragrances, and many healthcare institutions have discouraged their use altogether. In turn, people with their own allergies or unique dietary, health, or nutrition requirements will want to ensure they respectfully communicate their needs to the interviewer ahead of time. Don’t wait until the Thai peanut shrimp are on your plate to say, “Those will kill me.”

In cases in which applicants are asked to give an interview talk or scientific presentation, additional preparation is needed. Although that is really a topic unto itself, job seekers should be very comfortable with the material they are presenting and should have rehearsed the talk many times. If possible, they should give their talk to peers to gauge the level of detail that is appropriate, and they should become accustomed to answering relevant questions. Job seekers must determine what is expected ahead of time with respect to the length of the talk and what topics might be appropriate. Dr. Gronowski advises, “A common mistake when people present their PhD work is speaking in a lot of field-specific lingo. Dumb it down for the audience—spoon feed them. When we ask a candidate to give a presentation, we don’t really care about the topic. We want to see: Is this person articulate? Can this person tell a coherent story? Can this person answer questions? Can this person think independently and on their feet?”

Once at the interview, candidates can expect a wide range of questions designed to assess their abilities. Examples include questions about what you plan to do after a fellowship, your previous work experiences and challenges, how you deal with stress or conflict, or why you think a job in laboratory medicine is a good fit for you. Interviewers are not only processing the answers to these questions but also establishing if the candidate can think on their feet and communicate effectively. There are no “right answers” to these questions, but there are some wrong ones. Dr. Grenache and Dr. Moyer both indicated in their interviews that they want to discover if this person will be a good fit for the program. Do they present themselves professionally? Do they have confidence without arrogance? Can they communicate clearly and effectively? When speaking to a potential employer, Dr. Rifai, codirector of the ComACC program at Children’s Hospital Boston and Harvard Medical School, advises candidates to look the potential employer in the eye when speaking with them. Following this simple practice will convey both confidence and respect, reflecting some of the attributes needed to become a successful clinical chemist.

Candidates should also have the opportunity to turn the tables, so to speak, when they ask questions about the job. This is where the preparation pays off, by allowing the candidate to determine whether the position will be a fit for them. Among the numerous apro-
propriate questions, Dr. Moyer suggests that candidates ask about the city and area to which they are considering moving to determine if they will be content there. They may want to ask about the cost of living in a particular area, how long a commute takes in a large city, whether any of the facilities the candidate requires to be happy are available (e.g., sports/recreation, culture, child care), and if the climate suits their preferences. One story we heard was of a job seeker from the Caribbean who arrived for an interview in the middle of winter and who, after experiencing −40 °C outside the airport, turned around and got back on the plane without even bothering to show up for the interview. A candidate must find out what they are getting into before wasting everyone’s time and money.

Faux Pas

Common sense and good etiquette will go a long way toward a successful interview. Dr. Ann Gronowski indicated to us, “This is now a new recommendation from me to my fellows: Get an etiquette book and read it!” (2–4). Although we have heard some specific stories that, to protect the guilty, cannot be shared in detail, we can provide some clues as to some things that are particularly inappropriate. These faux pas include unreasonable demands, inappropriate material evident on a USB drive containing a presentation, and complaining about a current employer. Some other faux pas that Dr. Parnas, Medical Director of Laboratory Services, Palo Alto Medical Foundation, has heard about other candidates making were “not being appropriately prepared, not knowing what the job entails, not being honest about capabilities and availability, and not asking questions.” It is helpful for interviewees to picture themselves from the other side and consider what behaviors might offend them.

One challenging issue facing job seekers is when or if they should ask about salary and benefits. For postdoctoral programs, that is perfectly acceptable at a face-to-face interview. Most programs have these matters set in stone anyway and are important factors in making decisions. With a “real” job, there are differing opinions as to when this subject should be broached. Some suggest waiting until the potential employer brings it up, whereas others encourage a direct approach. It is generally agreed upon that this question should not be the first one a candidate asks. In the end, the program directors all agreed that candidates should be aware of how small a field laboratory medicine really is. Both ComACC program directors and senior laboratory professionals are world-recognized experts in their respective fields, and many know each other well. Candidates would do well not to disparage, disappoint, or be dishonest with any of them.

Above all, both the successful candidates and program directors said that people should simply be honest and be themselves. Interviewing is not a game, candidates have their own career and future at stake, and the employer will invest a substantial amount of time and money in them. If a position is taken on the basis of a falsehood, it won’t be long before the person is looking for another job.

Finally, it is important to mention that candidates do not need to go through this process alone. This is the time when a mentor can really make a difference. A good mentor will help guide the trainee all the way through the postdoctoral position or job process. And, in closing, a question we suggest you might consider asking your future training program or employer is whether they will fulfill your mentoring needs.

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