

## **NIEHS fellow begins career in life science consulting**

*By Aleksandra Adomas*

Georgette Charles, Ph.D., completed her nearly three-year postdoctoral training in the NIEHS Laboratory of Molecular Carcinogenesis in August, to begin a new phase in her career at AVOS Consulting in Raleigh, N.C., a division of INC Research that specializes in strategic and financial market analysis for life sciences companies. Charles' new job will be diverse, potentially requiring her to design a market access strategy for a new drug, or provide analysis of existing business problems and develop plans for improvement.

### **Bridging with the business world**

"Acquiring business language is essential when planning a transition to the business world, long before a job interview invitation," Charles said of her job search. To become familiar with core corporate concepts, Charles attended biotech business seminars at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, and entrepreneurship events at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. She was able to practice using professional terms and expand her understanding of financial issues, at educational and networking events in the area.

Interviewing with a consulting company is intense and requires business problem-solving abilities, in addition to a knowledge of the professional language. Charles honed her critical thinking skills with textbook case studies, as well as those published online by consulting companies. She was then able to compare her recommendations for tackling a problem with strategies developed by professionals.

Although most of the job applications Charles submitted during the final months of her job search came through her contacts and internal referrals, she found the AVOS job posting online. To prepare for her interview, Charles conducted extensive research on the company itself and on the acquisition by INC Research, which had been an AVOS client. This information allowed her to formulate a long list of questions that engaged the interviewers and demonstrated her interest in the position.

### **Self-assessment**

Charles devoted the last two years of her postdoctoral experience to finding her niche in science, and identifying critical skills, values, and interests crucial for her future career path. One of the tools she found useful for this self-assessment was an individual development plan, such as the one available on the [Science Careers website](http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/).  
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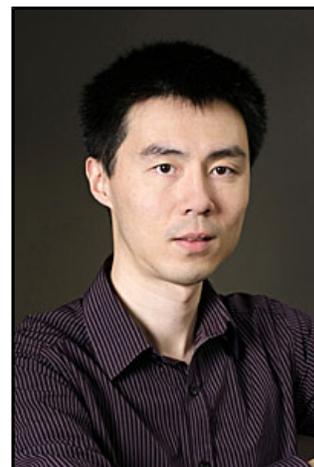
"I love science and hypothesis-driven research. I can delineate complex problems, pick them apart, and, at the end, present the results and deliverables," she explained. Charles also said she was looking forward to the team effort, developing long-term relationships with clients, and obtaining immediate feedback that are exemplified in the business consulting environment.

Having decided on life science consulting as a career, she focused on expanding her network. Charles quickly found out that her experience in stem cell research, because of its potential for clinical applications, generated interest and made informal conversations easier. Charles, together with mentor Guang Hu, Ph.D., NIEHS Stem Cell Biology Group lead researcher, identified a novel post-translational pathway that regulates self-renewal in mouse embryonic stem cells.

Charles credits reviewers at NIEHS career fairs and Tammy Collins, Ph.D., director of the NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development, with providing very constructive criticism about the content of her resume. She said that feedback from current business consultants, friends, and networking contacts was invaluable when developing her resume into the ideal business format. "It was a sometimes daunting process that took 3 to 4 months and reduced my 6-page resume to 1 1/2 pages that highlighted the necessary skills and experiences," she recalled.



*Charles made attending networking events easier, at the beginning, by inviting a friend along, who most of the time was not a scientist, but was able to provide friendly support and make her more comfortable in unfamiliar situations. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*



*"Georgette's postdoctoral training helped her develop and improve her analytical skills, which are the top requirement for a consulting job," Hu said. "The career services and workshops NIEHS and LMC organized helped her get to know what career options there are and prepared her for future career." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)*

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