

Is This *Really* What I Want to Be  
When I Grow Up?

Mentoring, job changes and the joys of a  
serpentine career

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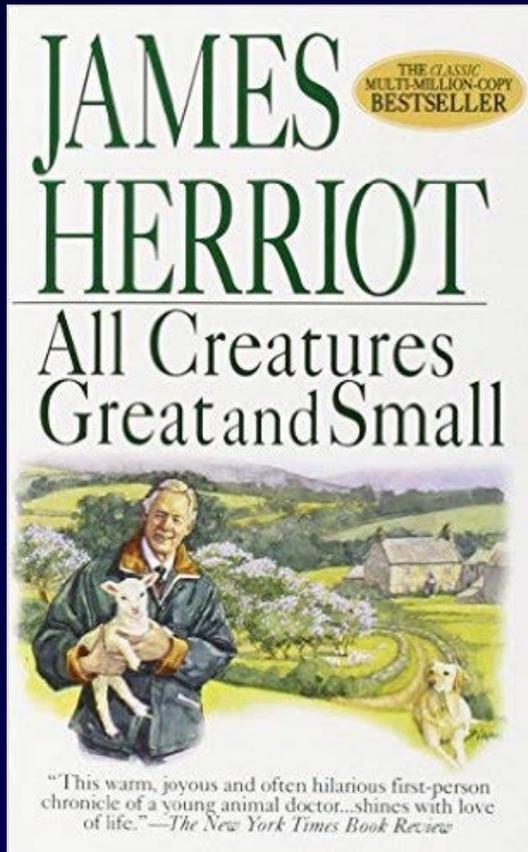
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# Objectives

- Describe strategies to identify potential mentors, both formal and informal, in the mentee's areas of interest.
- Identify methods to assess the costs and benefits of returning to school for a terminal degree.
- Compare the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Epidemic Intelligence Service (EIS) and the CSTE Applied Epidemiology Fellowship.

# I'm going to be James Herriot when I grow up!



- One single focus: *become a veterinarian*
- Everything focused on good grades, relevant experience
- Really didn't listen when wise people said, "But what if..."
- I knew better than they did, right?!

# Success! Success?



- Mixed animal practice in Cortez, Colorado
- Two-vet practice
- On-call pretty much all the time
- Very low pay
- Lonely!
- Perhaps not so successful?
- Left after 2 years with no clear plan

# What next?

- Visited classmates from vet school
- Peace Corps?
- How about a PhD?
  - Another four years?!
  - But, paid position, no loans needed, large animal focus
  - Admittedly easier as single, no kids, no home ownership at the time

# The journey continues...

- PhD in Veterinary Preventive Medicine
- Mentor suggested applying to EIS
- Two-year applied epidemiology fellowship with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Matching of applicants with programs: infectious diseases, chronic diseases, state health departments

# EIS: Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases, Fort Collins, CO



Plague  
investigations  
(NM, UT)



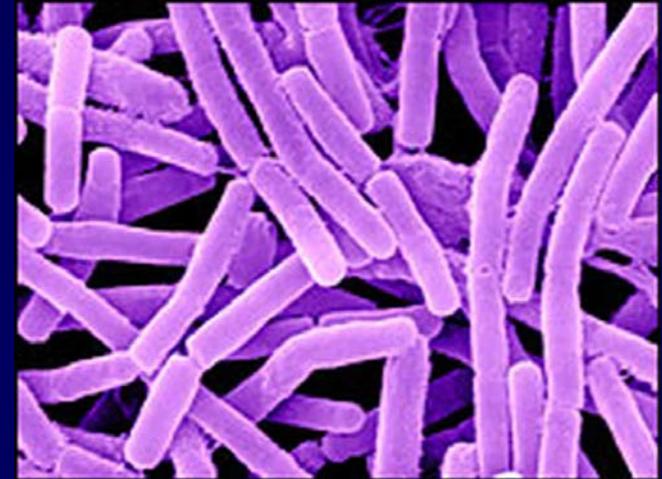
Tick-borne  
relapsing fever,  
Pacific NW

Binational  
dengue  
serosurvey,  
Laredo & Nuevo  
Laredo



# But then...what next?!

- June 2001: No epi jobs to be found
- Off to Athens, Georgia: veterinary vaccine company
- After 9/11 and anthrax letters:
  - Need for epidemiologists
  - Vector-borne training a plus
  - Waves of bioterrorism funding



# The power of networking

- Colleague from CDC
- Knew of epidemiology position at New Mexico's medical examiner, Office of the Medical Investigator
- Looking for MD, but would consider DVM, PhD
- Chance to visit my mom! Practice interview!
- Huh—liked the job, liked the people—now it's been 14 years

# Epidemiology at a medical examiner's office



- Utilizing medicolegal death investigation data to study public health challenges
- Many ME-investigated deaths are of public health significance (homicides, suicides, overdoses)
- Large electronic database
- Affiliated with UNM School of Medicine: teaching, research, mentoring

# Life as an epidemiologist at a medical examiner's office...

- Numerous and varied opportunities: overdose deaths, sudden unexplained infant deaths, forensic imaging, collaboration with CDC and health dept.
- Teaching medical students, MPH students, pathology residents
- Autonomy; can pursue own interests



# The importance of mentors

- Had them at every stage of school and career
- Often their kindness was most valued
- Had a couple of ‘duds’ but still learned from them!
- Can be formal or informal
- May evolve organically
- Variety important—not just people just like you

# As a mentor now...

- Formal research mentoring
  - Bring ideas to the table, not just expect the mentor to do all the work
  - Respect goes a long way; show up on time and prepared.
  - Agree on goals, timeline, expectations
  - The mentor is not your best friend/parent/therapist

# As a mentor now...

- Informal mentoring
  - Do some homework ahead of time—what questions do you have? Specific is better
  - Again, respect their time
  - ‘Thank you’ email or note (!) most appreciated



# Wise advice from a valued mentor:

- Consider three things:
  - Do you enjoy your work?
  - Do you make ‘enough’ money?
  - Do you like where you live?

If you can answer yes to two out of three, consider yourself lucky!

# But if not...

- Is this what I see myself doing for the next 5, 10, 25 years?
- Should I consider graduate school/terminal degree/fellowship?
- Are you seeking or fleeing?
- Consider: time investment, loans, relocation
- How do you like to spend your day?



# CDC's Epidemic Intelligence Service

- Two-year training program in applied epidemiology
- 70-80 EIS Officers selected each year
- MDs, DOs, PhDs, DrPH, ScD
- If DVM, DDS, PharmD, need MPH or equivalent
- Willing to relocate



# EIS Officer Assignments

## CDC Headquarters

- Specialized disease or problem-specific experience (e.g., vaccine preventable disease, STD, injury, ectopic pregnancy)

## State or Local Health Department

- Broad, front-line public health experience
- Surveillance, investigation, and intervention

# EIS Outbreak Investigations

- In 2014:
  - CDC deployed EIS Officers for 78 investigations
  - EIS Officers assigned to state or local health departments conducted an additional 206 epidemiologic investigations
  - 95% on-the-job learning
  - 5% classroom instruction, case studies, exercises, and e-learning

[www.cdc.gov/eis/](http://www.cdc.gov/eis/)

# EIS Emergency Operations Center Deployments

- West Nile Virus (2001)
- SARS (2003)
- Monkey Pox (2003)
- Avian Influenza (2004)
- Hurricane Katrina (2005)
- Rift Valley Fever (2005)
- Acanthamoeba keratitis (2007)
- H1N1 (2009)
- Earthquake in Haiti (2010)
- Fungal meningitis (2012)
- Polio eradication (2012)
- Ebola (2007, 2014)

**May 2017!**

<https://www.cdc.gov/eis/>

# CSTE Applied Epidemiology Fellowship

- Created to train a core group of public health epidemiologists
- Mentorship model and competency-based approach
- Modeled after EIS fellowship
- 230 fellows have graduated since inception in 2003

# AEF eligibility

- MPH, MSPH, MS or equivalent degree; advanced degree in health-related field
- Minimum of 4 graduate-level epidemiology courses and 1 graduate-level biostatistics course
- Looking for a long-term career in epi at the state or local level
- Demonstrated analytic skills
- United States citizenship

# CSTE AEF Core Competencies

- Epidemiologic methods
  - Evaluate a surveillance system, design an epi study, analyze epi data
- Written and oral communication skills
  - Field investigation report, surveillance report, present at national/regional meeting
- Public health practice, policy and legal issues
  - Understanding Institutional Review Boards (IRB)
  - Cultural sensitivity

# For More Information

Visit CSTE website  
[www.cste.org](http://www.cste.org)

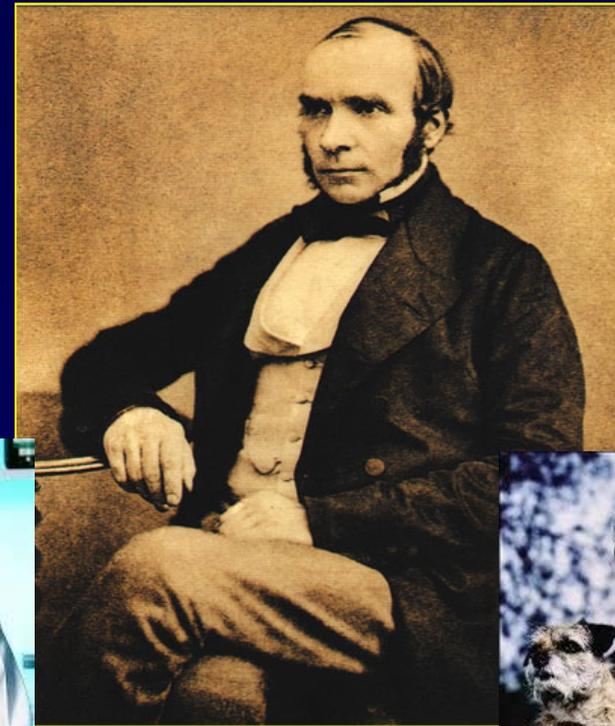
Fellowship information can be found on various pages under “Fellowships”

October 2017!

The screenshot displays the CSTE website interface. At the top, the navigation bar includes links for 'JOIN CSTE', 'CONTACT US', 'MY PROFILE', and 'SIGN OUT', along with a search bar. The main header features the CSTE logo and the text 'COUNCIL OF STATE AND TERRITORIAL EPIDEMIOLOGISTS' with the tagline 'Using the power of epidemiology to improve the public's health'. Below the header, a secondary navigation bar contains 'MEMBERS ONLY', 'WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT', 'FELLOWSHIPS', 'ACTIVITIES', 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE', and 'ABOUT'. The 'FELLOWSHIPS' menu is expanded, showing a list of options: 'APPLIED EPI FELLOWSHIP', 'SHINE', 'FELLOWSHIP OVERVIEW', 'FELLOWSHIP DETAILS', 'CORE COMPETENCIES', 'PROSPECTIVE FELLOWS', 'FELLOW APPLICATION TIMELINE', 'HOST SITE BILLETS', 'PROSPECTIVE HOST SITES', and 'RESOURCES'. A red arrow points from the text 'Fellowship information can be found on various pages under “Fellowships”' to the 'FELLOWSHIPS' menu item. Below the navigation, there are three main content blocks: 'ANNUAL CONFERENCE' (with a 'LEARN MORE' button), 'FELLOWSHIPS' (with a 'LEARN MORE' button), and 'ACTIVITIES' (with a 'LEARN MORE' button). At the bottom, there is a 'HEADLINES' section with a link to 'Official List of Nationally Notifiable Conditions' and a 'My Profile' link.

# Public Health: You never know where it will take you!

- Tremendous opportunities
- MPH/epi training adds strength and diversity to any career
- Keep an open mind
- Importance of mentoring



# What about you?

- Where are you currently?
- Are you considering changes? Why?
- Have you been able to find mentors as needed?
  - What makes a good mentor from your perspective?

