



**Mallory Abate, MD**, is an assistant professor at Saint Louis University in Missouri. Dr. Abate also recently completed her term as physician advisor for *DW Directions*. We are very grateful for her service!

## Job Searching



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## Career Case Study

Career Case Study is a quarterly feature to help residents with choosing a subspecialty.

**Next issue: Dermato-pathology**

## Career case study

# The academic dermatology career path

Mallory Abate, MD, interviewed by *DW Directions*

### Why did you choose to pursue a specialty in academics?

I really like working with the residents and I like to teach. My niche is in inpatient dermatology. So, as the dedicated inpatient dermatologist at Saint Louis University (SLU), I get to see a lot of interesting hospital consults which I love. I have resident clinics, too, so academics provides a nice mix. In academics, you get to see a broad patient population, a lot of difficult cases and rare diseases, and teach residents at the same time, so every day is fun and challenging.

### What personality traits are most desirable and helpful in this type of work? Is it more social or solitary; do you need good "people" skills?

Yes, it is definitely more social. For example, there are four other attendings plus residents at my workstation, so we are always interacting. However, you don't have to be a social butterfly by any means. We all have different personalities, which is what makes it work. You do need to be able to work well in a group setting and be able to teach. I would also say that curiosity is a trait that we all share — even as attendings, we still like to learn. There are weekly grand rounds, journal clubs, lectures, etc., so you have to enjoy this "academic" part of dermatology in order to thrive in this environment.

### Describe a typical day. What are the various tasks? How much time are you spending with patients, office work, etc.?

My morning clinics start at 8 a.m. The resident sees the patient first and then we go in together. In the afternoons, I see GvHD patients in a bone marrow transplant clinic and then hospital consults after that, all with the consult resident. The vast majority of my day is spent seeing patients, reviewing results and signing charts, and teaching. I do spend a fair amount of time at night working on papers, and presentations, or reading on challenging cases.

### Does the work vary at different times of the year?

Not much — I will say that clinics are slower in July because the new residents are just starting so everything is new to them. Then toward the end of the year, those clinics move much faster.

### Is travel a factor in this profession?

This is very individual to the academic institution — at SLU, I do work at various locations, which requires frequent travel; however, a lot of this is by choice. But, in residency, all of our sites were connected or in close proximity.

### What areas of your residency training and education are being put to use the most?

This is easy — all of them! Basic medical knowledge, teaching, time efficiency, etc. I am really glad that I trained at a VA. That has been essential in my education.

### How does a career path in academics differ from other practice models?

As far as how the practice model compares to private practice, a major plus of academics is that you don't have any of the business stressors of private practice, so you are able to come to work each day and focus on medicine. On the flip side, the salary is going to be less and you aren't your own boss, so you can't, for example, take off on a last-minute vacation or choose which EHR you use. So, there are pros and cons, but more pros in my opinion.

### In terms of need, workforce, and opportunities, how does it compare? Is it more difficult to land an academic dermatology position than another subspecialty?

There is probably a much broader selection of academic positions in general dermatology as compared to a subspecialty like dermpath or Mohs. This is because you need a larger ratio of general derms to subspecialists in order to support their caseload.

### Are the networking opportunities any greater or different in an academic environment?

Definitely greater. Academics provides so many easy avenues for networking, both within the field of dermatology and beyond. This is because you are constantly surrounded by other physicians whom you can make natural, unforced connections with. Then you make connections through your new connections. You have the opportunity to give lectures to other departments and collaborate on mutual patients. Your colleagues are able to introduce you to dermatologists in other parts of the country — so yes, the opportunities are truly endless.

### Is there something specific to academic dermatology that is personally rewarding to you? Why will residents feel satisfied in this choice?

I think a lot of people don't go into academics (vs. private practice) because of the salary, but job satisfaction is paramount and a life in academics is *incredibly* rewarding. If more people knew that, I don't think salary would factor in as much. I get satisfaction from being challenged, seeing cool cases, and from teaching residents. I have fun at work each day, and that is priceless in my opinion. **DR**