Meet the Pans president

Dr. Michael N Lehman

Can you give us an overview of your professional path to date and to becoming President of the Pan American Neuroendocrine Society? I've always been passionate about research, and from the start was interested in basic discovery about how the brain works and what makes us think, feel, behave the way we do. My interests early on focused on two questions I thought were fundamental to neuroscience: what brain circuits are responsible for reproduction, and what is the neural basis for circadian rhythms. I've been fortunate to have collaborators and students who have enabled me to make meaningful contributions to both areas and, in the last 10 years, because of exciting research directions resulting from our discovery of KNDy neurons have focused exclusively on neuroendocrine research. My career has also involved a substantial commitment to leadership in areas very much outside of my own personal interests. I have found that particularly satisfying, and my current role as President of PANS reflects that, personally and professionally. I think that leadership skills and the opportunity to acquire them are not as explicitly presented as they should be in our field and others and hope to make them more accessible with support for leadership training and experience in the coming years.

You have been a very successful scientist with a fruitful career, but is there anything you wish you had done differently or wish you could change about your journey? My only wish is that it had been easier to balance the challenge of being part of a dual-career couple. Many of you know that my wife, Lique Coolen, is also a neuroscientist – she collaborates with me on neuroendocrine studies and also has her own independent, externally funded program in other areas. She is also a talented leader in her own right and has contributed as a Dean for Research, Graduate, and Postdoctoral Studies at multiple institutions. It has been extremely difficult to find universities where we've been equally and independently valued, and she has often been viewed as a trailing spouse. Hopefully, in the future, more universities will be forward-thinking in their approach to recruiting faculty that have partners who are also pursuing careers in research and administration.

You mentored many researchers at every level of their careers – can you tell us about your approach to mentoring trainees and early career scientists? Mentoring is one of the most important ways we can help each other and contribute to the future of our field.

Dr. Mike Lehman,

Brain Health Research Institute, Director

Department of biological Sciences, Professor

Kent State University, Kent, OH.

It has been very important to me both as a mentor to trainees and early career researchers (ECRs) in my lab and the departments I have chaired, and also as a mentee who has continued to value having mentors even as a senior leader. Good mentoring relationships are built on openness, trust, respect, and a willingness to listen and share. They can obviously be in the context of research but can also involve discussions about other aspects of our careers, including teaching, leadership roles, work-life balance and other issues that impact our professional lives. Each mentoring relationship needs to take its own course, some are short term and others may continue throughout our careers; in addition, good mentorship is not limited to having a single mentor, a network of mentors is often helpful for support in different areas, e.g., research vs teaching. Finally, mentoring can be reciprocal in its benefits: I am currently involved in a project for another national society exploring "reverse mentoring" where the traditional roles are reversed, and the mentor is junior-level person and the mentee a senior researcher or administrator. This type of mentoring relationship provides insights for the senior individual into the perspectives of the trainee or ECR, and an appreciation of generational differences in culture and experience. Reverse mentoring programs are common in the corporate world but not yet in academia or our scientific societies, and I would like to see this type of mentoring explored in our field as well.

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You are the new PANS president – what direction will the society take in the next few years, in particular in terms of supporting career and professional development? Our society is at an exciting junction, and we have a number of new directions and potential initiatives ahead of us. Creating programming for trainees and ECRs to support career and professional development is no question a primary goal, and I am exceptionally pleased that we have a vibrant and committed PANS Trainee/Early Career Researcher committee working on this. The types of activities that I envision (some of which are currently being planned by the committee) include webinars on career development topics, a mentor-mentee matching program, increased opportunities for trainee/ECR members to present their research both in webinars and at our in-person meetings, and support for research exchange visits between labs across borders. I would also like to see increased representation of our trainees and ECRs on our Executive Council and committees consistent with the goal of providing training and experience in service and leadership.

What advice would you give neuroendocrine trainees in deciding on their next few steps? Select a training experience and supervisor based on your personal career goals and what will serve you best in the future as additional transferable skills and experiences. Selection of a lab should be based on more than just the reputation of the PI – potential supervisors should be engaged and supportive of your short and long-term career development. For postdocs, that includes supporting your transition to independence, and making sure that you have a project you can take with you when you leave their lab. And I strongly encourage everyone (and not just trainees) consider using an Individual Development Plan (e.g., see https://myidp.sciencecareers.org) or similar instrument to help inform their decision-making about their career. Consider long-term goals - what will make you most happy as a career? And, of course, don't disregard the importance of personal relationships, family, and/or other passions outside of science in making decisions about your career.

What are you views on the future of the neuroendocrine research field? What challenges or opportunities lie ahead, in your opinion? I think science is more of a team sport that ever before, and for us to truly take advantage of the multitude of advanced tools, large-scale data analyses, and modelling approaches to understanding neuroendocrine systems, we will need to fully embrace open science and transparency in our individual research programs and be willing to share and collaborate in meaningful ways. This will particularly be a challenge for the next generation of neuroendocrine researchers, trainees and ECRs, where institutions will need to change their way of evaluating the careers of scientists for jobs and promotions. At the same time, I remain inspired by the passion for discovery I continue to see in junior-level neuroendocrine researchers as well as those in more established roles - there is no question that our understanding of the complexity of neuroendocrine systems, at molecular, cellular, systems, and behavioral levels, will continue to grow, as will the translation of that knowledge to advancing human health and treating disease. I am optimistic and bullish about the future of neuroendocrinology!

This interview was given to Dr. Richard Piet (Kent State University) as an activity of the *Pans Career Development*.