



COMMENT

Early career investigator highlight biocommentary

Ariel A. Salas ¹*Pediatric Research* (2020) 88:688; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41390-020-01129-3>

I was born and raised at 12,000 feet above sea level in La Paz, Bolivia. My parents worked tirelessly to support my education. While living in my hometown, I earned my M.D. degree from the Universidad Mayor de San Andres. I also completed my first residency in Pediatrics at Dr. Ovidio Aliaga Children's Hospital. After moving to the United States, I completed a second residency in Pediatrics at CHOP, a fellowship in Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine at UAB, and a master program in Public Health also at UAB. I am currently an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at UAB.

Several mentors, collaborators, and friends have influenced my research career. Jorge Salazar, a pediatric intensivist, introduced me to evidence-based critical care and hands-on clinical research during my last year of medical school. I chose Pediatrics as a career in part because of him. He made me realize that learning, practicing, and producing evidence-based medicine have long-lasting effects on the patients we treat. Eduardo Aranda (deceased) and Eduardo Mazzi provided valuable support during my clinical training in Pediatrics. My first two peer-reviewed publications were the result of their mentorship. William W. Fox and Amed Soliz encouraged me to pursue a neonatology career in the United States. They also provided vital mentorship during my transition into fellowship. Through my Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine training, I met Wally Carlo and Namasivayam Ambalavanan.

They helped me gain a deeper understanding of clinical research. With their guidance, I pursued specific training in research methods to develop more rigorous clinical studies. As part of my MSPH thesis, I designed and executed my first randomized trial of early feeding practices in extremely preterm infants. Since then, my research focus has been identifying critical knowledge gaps in neonatal nutrition and growth outcomes.

Under the leadership of my current mentor and life coach, Wally Carlo, I have been able to establish several collaborations and publish with investigators from other institutions, including my SPR coach, Camilia Martin. The article published in this issue is my first report on infant body composition as a primary outcome of growth. In the next 5 years, I plan to continue investigating the effects of dietary interventions on infant body composition in partnership with my new collaborators, Sarah Taylor and Nancy Krebs.

I think early-career investigators should:

1. develop a growth mindset,
2. find an environment that fosters creativity and leadership,
3. master concepts of structured and effective communication,
4. promote massive collaboration, and
5. learn more about mindfulness.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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