

COMMENT



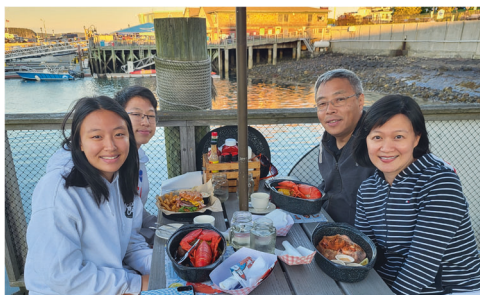
Early career investigator biocommentary: Elizabeth Yen

Elizabeth Yen ^{1,2}✉

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I came to America from Indonesia to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies. After getting my master’s degree in psychology, I worked as a case manager in a foster care system and encountered many children affected by the opioid epidemic. This experience inspired me to pursue a medical career. I underwent a post-baccalaureate premedical study at Columbia University, then received an MD degree from Rutgers (then known as Robert Wood Johnson Medical School—University of Medicine and Dentistry in New Jersey). I completed my Pediatric Residency and Neonatal-Perinatal Medicine Fellowship at the same institution. There I found my passion for a physician-scientist career.



With my family, Summer 2022

With this career goal in mind and the tremendous support of my husband and children, we moved to Massachusetts after my fellowship. I joined Tufts Medical Center because of its robust research infrastructure. As a neonatologist caring for infants exposed to prenatal opioids, I discovered my research focus: to understand the molecular-structural-behavioral impact of prenatal opioid exposure. Under the mentorship of Dr. Jill Maron (then the Executive Director of Mother Infant Research Institute at Tufts,

now the Pediatrician-in-Chief at Women & Infants Hospital in Rhode Island) and Dr. Jonathan Davis (Newborn Medicine Division Chief and Tufts CTSI Associate Director), we carved out a competitive research strategy that led to several pilot and career development research awards. The K12 Building Interdisciplinary Research Career in Women’s Health and Charles H. Hood Foundation Award funded our novel research using neonatal saliva and brain imaging to study the sex-specific and pro-inflammatory effects of prenatal opioids on the developing brain, particularly in reward signaling and feeding regulation, and long-term growth and neurodevelopmental outcomes.

My advice to my fellow early-career investigators is to be persistent and stay inspired. Have the grit and the courage to explore novel areas that are scientifically sound. Seek mentorship, sponsorship, and a network of people who support us with honesty and integrity. Most importantly, remain passionate and focused on why we chose our career path in the first place: to advance pediatric research, improve treatment options, and provide the best pediatric care. All these essential ingredients are key to our success in mentoring and paving the way for others in the future.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares no competing interests.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Elizabeth Yen.

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