

Drs. Harmit Malik and Dara Lehman win mentorship awards

Malik receives 12th annual McDougall Mentoring Award; Lehman receives inaugural Hutchison Mentoring Award

December 19, 2018 | By Kristen Woodward



Drs. Dara Lehman and Harmit Malik were honored recently — complete with custom bobbleheads crafted in their likenesses — for their dedication to mentorship.

Photos courtesy of SPAC

celebrates faculty members who, like McDougall, “demonstrate a similar dedication to and enthusiasm for mentoring their graduate students, postdoctoral fellows and/or medical fellows.”

The Hutchison Mentoring Award, in its first year, is named after Dr. Nancy Hutchison, co-founder of the Hutch’s **Science Education Partnership**, which she led from 1991 until her retirement in 2016. She is highly regarded for her dedication to science education and her excellent mentorship of those in and around SEP. In her honor, the Hutchison Mentoring Award recognizes non-faculty employees or trainees who, like Hutchison, “demonstrate a similar dedication to and enthusiasm for mentoring others within the Fred Hutch community.”

Both awards recognize mentoring excellence in more than a dozen categories ranging from research-skill development and data analysis/interpretation to the “human” side of mentoring — exemplifying a work-life balance both inside and outside the lab.

Biologist **Dr. Harmit Malik**, a member of the Basic Sciences Division, and Dr. Dara Lehman, an independently funded senior staff scientist in the Human Biology Division’s **Overbaugh Lab**, were honored recently — complete with custom bobbleheads crafted in their likenesses — for their dedication to mentoring. Malik is the 12th annual recipient of the McDougall Mentoring Award, and Lehman is the inaugural recipient of the Hutchison Mentoring Award. **The Student-Postdoc Advisory Committee**, or SPAC, **sponsors the awards**, which were announced Dec. 6 during SPAC’s annual holiday party at the Hutch.

The McDougall Mentoring Award, established in 2007, is named in honor of the late Dr. James McDougall, an early member of the Basic Sciences Division who died of gastric cancer in 2003. McDougall, who also had appointments in the Public Health Sciences and Human Biology divisions, was internationally known for his research on the role of DNA viruses in cancer. He, along with his wife, **Dr. Denise Galloway**, a member of Human Biology, made critical discoveries that definitively linked human papillomaviruses to cervical and other anogenital cancers. The award

Dr. Harmit Malik

Malik, who joined the Basic Sciences faculty in 2003, is also a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator. He studies genetic conflict — the competition between genes and proteins with opposing functions that drives evolutionary change. He also studies the evolutionary processes that drive the body's interaction with viruses such as HIV as well as ancient viruses whose remnants litter the human genome.

"It's a privilege to be recognized for mentoring, especially in an institution that values mentoring as much as the Hutch does," Malik said. In addition to receiving a bobblehead to commemorate the mentorship honor, he received a bottle of scotch, which Galloway donates every year from a distillery in Scotland. Malik estimates that he has mentored 25 lab members over the years, and he cites their excellence and success as being instrumental in shaping his scientific reputation.

Here are a few excerpts from Malik's nomination letters:

When I first met Harmit he told me that he measures his own success by his trainees' success. As a potential rotation student, I was worried this meant there would be pressure to pursue an academic faculty career or hit specific journal benchmarks for publications. I couldn't have been more wrong. I quickly realized that he strives to get each of us on track for the job of our dreams — no matter what that job is.

Harmit is passionate about science communication, and his lab is a place for rigorous training in public speaking. He emphasizes building communication soft skills that help all of his lab members in moving to their next steps. Even with his busy travel schedule Harmit always makes time for reviewing practice job talks.

[Harmit] has structured the lab as an ecosystem built on curiosity, mutual respect and peer support. Although our projects in the lab cover a wide range of areas, he brings people together and facilitates cross-disciplinary discussions that are inspiring and creative, and lead to exciting and new ideas.

Harmit is the driver of creativity and adventurousness in the lab. His mentorship has built an environment where we feel encouraged to explore, take calculated scientific risks and think big. His research program is expansive and wide-ranging because of how he mentors his people ... His mentorship has shaped a diverse group of people as independent, creative and successful scientists. He brings great minds together, inspires creative and exciting science, and supports and nurtures those around him.

Dr. Dara Lehman

Lehman joined the Overbaugh Lab as a doctoral student in 2003, and her research interests over the years have included understanding the implications of antiretrovirals used to treat and prevent HIV transmission in cohorts in Kenya. Overbaugh herself is a renowned mentor; in 2016 she was recognized with the lifetime **Nature Mentoring Award in Science**.

"Dara is almost always the first stop for trainees in our group who need advice and support; she is also my first stop for the same," said Overbaugh, who holds the Chair for Graduate Education at the Hutch. "She has exceptional people skills, and that quality, combined with her caring nature and strong communications skills, make her an

extraordinary mentor.”

Together, Overbaugh and Lehman have mentored dozens of junior scientists in their lab over the years.

“These awards are really a tribute to the culture of mentoring at the Hutch — which Nancy Hutchison’s work here contributed to significantly. I am incredibly honored to have received this award in her name,” said Lehman, who not only received a bobblehead, but also a bottle of wine and the book **“The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life,”** which Hutchison donated.

Below are excerpts from some of Lehman’s nomination letters:

Her reliable sensibility, acute scientific reasoning and warmth of personality make her a desirable coach, mentor and friend. ... I’m a bit mystified as to how she so gracefully juggles all of her mentoring relationships on top of guiding research projects for her two RO1 grants ... I certainly revere Dara and I deliberately attempt to mimic her work-life balance, priorities, compassion and selfless advocacy for trainees in science.

Dara was always my go-to person for questions about science, graduate school, career options, teaching, writing and life. ... Dara’s mentorship continued throughout my graduate training. I was incredibly nervous to give an oral presentation at a large conference and Dara sat through not one but two practice talks, providing incredibly helpful feedback and encouragement, and I was so relieved to see her in the front row during my talk. After the talk, she was the first person to come up to me and tell me how “on point” I was delivering the talk and answering questions. That was the first time I actually felt I belonged in graduate school and excited to further the research we were working on.

I know she probably would not agree with me, but I always say I would never have completed my Ph.D. if she hadn’t been there for me. Believe me, this is true, and I continue to consult Dara to date! She is an amazing woman.

Dara encourages her mentees to come by her office whenever they need help, and boy have I milked that privilege. ... One particularly memorable trip to her office came on a day where I was distraught over using the wrong enzyme in a PCR reaction, wasting precious samples. I started apologizing, but before I could finish my sentence, Dara said to me in a stern yet somehow incredibly kind voice, “If you want to be a scientist you need to be comfortable making mistakes. Don’t apologize, just learn from this and keep working hard.” This advice has stuck with me both in the lab and personally, as failure is inevitable and uncomfortable, but when I frame it as a growing experience, it is a lot easier to handle.

Beyond providing scientific guidance, Dara is dedicated to people’s well-being outside the lab. Some examples include: charting a scenic biking route for commuting, helping a single mom coordinate day care scheduling and arranging a fly-fishing trip for a trainee struggling with homesickness.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Contact **Communications**

T 206.667.4211

