



***Sade Spencer, D.Phil.***

***An Interview with ACNP Associate Member, Sade Spencer, D.Phil.***

***Q. Could you tell me a bit about yourself?***

**A.** I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Pharmacology and a member of the Medical Discovery Team on Addiction. I completed my Ph.D. in Neuroscience at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in the laboratory of Dr. Colleen McClung (Fellow). I received additional postdoctoral training in the laboratory of Dr. Peter Kalivas (Fellow Emeritus) at the Medical University of South Carolina. My laboratory uses preclinical models to study the mechanisms related to the development of substance use disorders. We seek a better understanding of the pathological brain mechanisms associated with repeated drug use which may inform the identification of novel targets for drug development or neuromodulation.

***Q. When did you join the ACNP?***

**A.** I have been Associate Member of ACNP since 2019, but I have been attending the meeting annually since 2012. I received a Travel Award for the meeting in 2014.

***Q. As a member of the ACNP, have you had the opportunity to interact with innovative thought leaders in the field of neuroscience?***

**A.** Most definitely. Because I initially attended the meeting as a travel awardee and postdoctoral trainee, I had the opportunity to be matched with a mentor in Dr. Carlos Bolanos-Guzman (Fellow) whose research interests were well-aligned with my own projects. In addition to this formal mentoring, I have benefitted from numerous informal interactions with senior scientists at the meeting. The women's networking events including the URM women's breakfast have offered fantastic opportunities to be inspired by and learn from my female role models in the field.

**Q. How has your membership in the ACNP put you in touch with the professionals who have shaped the field as it currently exists - and will enable you to be one of those who shape the various neuroscientific disciplines in the future?**

**A.** The College brings together pioneers, innovators, and the next generation of experts in the field of neuropharmacology. One of my fondest memories at ACNP occurred at one of the Opening Receptions. I ended up having the most interesting conversation with a Fellow Emeritus about the early days of psychedelic research. Unfortunately, I was too enthralled with his story telling to remember to note his name. This was several years ago now, and it is so interesting to see the re-emergence of this area with psychedelic research centers popping up across the United States. In addition to chance meetings like this, ACNP is where I can catch up on all the latest research related to substance use disorders/reward- both basic and clinical- as well as closely related research on mental illness.

**Q. The primary functions of the College are research and education. Do you feel the college offers investigators the opportunity for cross-disciplinary communication?**

**A.** Absolutely. As a basic researcher, it is so important to stay connected to and be informed by what is going on in the clinic. Basic and clinical researchers alike can benefit from bidirectional translation of knowledge. I really appreciate the emphasis on constructing scientific panels that highlight both domains. My favorite thing about the ACNP meeting is the high level of engagement at the poster sessions.

**Q. How about the opportunity to promote the application of various neuroscientific disciplines to the study of all forms of mental illness and their treatment? If so, how have these experiences helped your career?**

**A.** I always leave the meeting with fresh inspiration. As an early career investigator still shaping my research program, I am open to new collaborations and expanding my research footprint. My ACNP colleagues and the annual meeting offer an invaluable sounding board for ideas as these colleagues are also my peer reviewers on publications and NIH study sections. My ACNP interactions have also facilitated invitations from others for my peer review service.

**Q. Anything else to say to the readers? I know you have been involved in the Diversity efforts of the College, can you tell us about that?**

**A.** Yes, I have been a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force for the past couple of years. I have been really impressed with the way in which our current ACNP President, Dr. Linda Brady (Fellow) has championed diversity issues over this past year of her tenure as well as the work of the Program Committee. As a Diversity and Inclusion Task Force Member, I have helped put together two study groups for the annual meeting (one at the 2020 virtual meeting, and one at the upcoming 2021 hybrid meeting). I am also involved in organizing and facilitating some of the networking and social events sponsored by the Task Force including the URM Women's networking event in collaboration with the fabulous Dr. Carolyn Rodriguez (Member). After being an attendee at the Task Force events as a trainee, it is really rewarding to now be involved on the other side and pay it forward. I have really enjoyed working with this group.