



Making the move from academia to industry: how has Luciano Rossetti fared?

In September 2006, Luciano Rossetti started work as senior vice president and franchise head of Diabetes and Obesity as well as Cardiovascular at Merck Research Laboratories. This came after a long and successful academic career, much of it spent at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. After a year in his new position, the *JCI* spoke with Rossetti about his transition from academia to industry and how his working life has changed in the past year.

JCI: What drove your decision to move from academia to industry?

Rossetti: My professional career has been dedicated to medical research with a long-term goal to have a real impact on the life of patients affected by diabetes and other metabolic disorders. Although I had many successes in my academic endeavors, I still felt an unrealized aspiration to apply advancements in science to patient care in a more immediate fashion. In that light, the opportunity to join Merck was ideal as it allowed me to take on this new challenge.

JCI: What have you found the most difficult aspect of your transition from academia to industry?

Rossetti: Understanding the overall culture of the organization has been challenging, whereas differences in the research methods have been quite manageable. With regard to this, the most challenging part of my transition has been balancing the need to rapidly learn the intricacies of the drug discovery and development processes with managing at a high level of responsibility. In my research lab, I was able to develop research strategies and closely monitor the execution of the experiments. In my new role I have had to learn to step back from this; to relinquish control of some tasks and fully trust the expertise of my colleagues.

JCI: After one year away from academia, is there anything you miss?

Rossetti: I miss the immediacy of the lab; the daily excitement of data flowing through the door of my office. I also miss working with my Einstein colleagues and interacting with a wide range of trainees, from students to residents to fellows and junior scientists.

JCI: What have you been able to achieve in industry that you would not have been able to in academia?

Rossetti: It is early in my transition and therefore difficult to point to very many achievements here at Merck. It is also important to acknowledge that this is not an "individual sport." Everything we accomplish belongs to the team. The organizational structure I operate in (which we call a franchise) is ideally suited to provide a rapid bridge from laboratory



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experiments to clinical investigation. In this regard, it has been particularly thrilling to unravel the human physiology of a metabolic pathway or a signaling system in early clinical studies. During my academic career, only rarely was I able to test hypotheses in basic experiments as well as in human studies.

JCI: Now that you are in management, do you manage to go to as many meetings as you used to?

Rossetti: My responsibilities at Merck span a much larger scientific field than I was used to. For example, I have now been to several cardiology meetings as well as

diabetes meetings. In fact, I rarely get to attend scientific gatherings with a relatively narrow scientific focus and when I do it's immensely refreshing and stimulating.

JCI: When and how did you become interested in metabolic diseases?

Rossetti: When I was just about 6 years old my father was first diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. The disease had a major impact on his life and this certainly played a major role in sparking my interest in medicine and later on in endocrinology.

JCI: Young scientists are often torn between pursuing an academic career versus entering industry. As you have experienced both sides of the divide, do you have any advice for these people?

Rossetti: Both careers are immensely rewarding and it depends on the individual's characteristics and aspirations. I also think that there are many more common features than generally appreciated. The fundamental science going on in industry and in academia is often of equally high caliber. Furthermore, though the ultimate goal in industry is to contribute to the discovery of new therapies for human diseases, there is also an increased emphasis on publishing in top scientific journals. Perhaps a key consideration in making the career choice is one's propensity toward individual versus shared commitments and rewards. Although in academia we emphasize collaboration and learning, the principle investigator is mostly responsible for the end-to-end operations of the research lab and is largely credited with the achievements of the lab. In the industry setting the accomplishments are shared by multiple individuals working within sequential teams that chaperone the projects through the long drug discovery and development process.

JCI: Would you ever consider returning to academia?

Rossetti: Never say never. Academia has singular aspects that you cannot find anywhere else, but for now I am giving industry my full attention.

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