



COMMENT

You are not alone!



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J. Winck in a "Letter to the Editor", published in this issue of RPP, addresses a very important issue for the future of research in respiratory medicine in Portugal: "40 years of history of PhD graduates in Respiratory Medicine in Portugal¹. Towards professorship or beyond?" When looking at the data he presents from the perspective of someone who has been following the scene of respiratory medicine in Portugal for almost that period the results are not surprising. In a way the results are even surprisingly better than expected assuming that these PhD graduates are all medical doctors and specialists (the information is not given but they probably all are), so they are not just postdocs, they have travelled a longer way! But, if they want to continue to be active in biomedical research they must assume the pains of the doctorate species.

If we look at the future of postdocs worldwide the situation is not very promising² but the international scientific community is aware of the problem and is making attempts to change the picture: limiting the duration of the status to a maximal period of six years, limiting the funding period to a percentage of PhD graduates, rewarding the already financially successful. Whether these are good solutions is another matter. In addition it remains to be proven if these measures can be applied to clinical PhD. They have other pathways to pursue their careers.

Nevertheless, all postdocs share a common trait: they have the potential to become independent scientists and, in the case of respiratory medicine or any other medical

specialties, leaders in their own clinical field. Will this leadership be directly related to a professorship appointment in respiratory medicine is an interesting debate that needs to be addressed on an institutional perspective. I am not arguing against the argument of Winck which states that "presence of academics as heads of respiratory medicine departments is a powerful means for strengthening medical research and implementing clinical practice." The point I wish to make is that professorship is not enough to attract the best PhD graduates to pursue an academic career. There must be an institutional strategy to support clinical research and competitive national programs to financially support clinical research projects. The establishment of a shared PhD program in the form of a Portuguese Doctoral School in Respiratory Medicine could be an interesting challenge for the future by keeping institutional identities and, at the same time, reinforcing the network of academics and non-academics committed to the expansion of this ever growing and fascinating multidisciplinary field.

References

1. Winck JC. 40 years of history of PhD graduates in Respiratory Medicine in Portugal. Towards professorship or beyond? *Rev Port Pneumol.* 2016;22:236–7.
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DOI of original article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rppnen.2016.01.005>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rppnen.2016.05.003>

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