

CT Intern Academy 2012
Speaker questions – Ellen Andrews
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1. What do you look for in a resume?

I look for passion first in protecting consumers and fixing our broken health care system. Beyond that, I look for consistency, a history of sticking with something, and eagerness to learn. I also for balance – the ability to see both sides of any issue. And the willingness to work hard.

2. What classes do you recommend for students interested in your field? What skills are important to develop? (writing, fiscal analysis, public speaking, etc.)

Learn to write well. Clear communications is key and, unfortunately, too rare. The key to writing well is to read a lot of good writing. Get subscriptions to well-written journals and magazines. Carry reading in your bag with you always – either on paper or electronically. Whenever you are waiting in line or for an appointment, pull out your reading

A close second are good research skills. Google is not enough. Know how to complete a literature review. Learn which sources are credible and which aren't. If you aren't sure, ask someone. (But before you ask, look for yourself. My pet peeve is getting a call from a student along the lines of "I have to write a paper on Medicare. What is that? Can you send me something on that?") It gets easier as you do it.

3. What keeps you motivated in your job day-to-day?

Calls from consumers struggling to access health care in the messed-up, hostile "system" we've let evolve. Just a few days taking consumer calls and you will be ready to either pull your hair out and give up or, hopefully, you will devote yourself to fixing it.

4. What was your career and educational path to your current position?

I wouldn't recommend my career path to anyone interested in a career in health policy. I was a research scientist for over a decade. I learned important analytical skills but I probably could have gotten here faster taking a direct route.

Health policy began for me in direct service, working in the Perinatal Unit at the Hill Health Center. I then went to work in the Public Health Committee at the Capitol, then to various nonprofits. It became clear that CT needed an organization that focused on health policy, so we built one. Knowing that engaging consumers and providers from the real world is key to successful policymaking, we added consumer assistance to our mission. And now we also train students and others interested in pursuing health policy work, so I can retire.

5. What risks did you take?

Leaving a nice career path in science was scary and I thought a long time about it. But I just found myself living for the two afternoons a week I spent at the Hill Health Center. I miss science but don't regret my decision.

6. What terms and acronyms do people need to know?

We will have a list on our site, www.cthealthintern.org, based on input from everyone. But a word of caution, any list has a short shelf life. You need to be constantly learning and health policy is famous for making new terms that have the same (or very similar) meaning to previous versions. (But you probably shouldn't mention this in an interview – people are very invested in being trendy.)

7. What sources of info do you check regularly?

Kaiser, New England Journal of Medicine, Health Affairs – journal and blog, Commonwealth Fund, blogs and websites from my colleagues in other states, federal and some state government sites, national and CT news sources.

8. What's your best advice to students? What to do and what not to worry about

- Network, but not in the self-serving way they teach you – no one gets anything done alone, and people help people who are helpful
- Be helpful to as many people as possible – a corollary to the previous thought
- Don't hoard information – if you have it, give it away, become a useful source
- Keep learning, stay curious
- Manage your time but leave time for wandering
- Keep paper and pen nearby always – you never know when the solution is going to hit you
- Show up -- *Eighty percent of success is just showing up.* -- Woody Allen – and be on time
- They don't have to join the cause, just vote yes – when you get the answer you want, stop talking
- If it isn't working, stop talking (you'll just dig them in deeper)
- Balance passion with perspective -- remember that everyone is just doing their job, everyone has a valid point of view
- Policy is not apolitical, understand the context of what you are asking for (asking for a tax increase in an election year is not going to happen), you don't have to immerse yourself in politics, but know the landscape
- Don't take yourself too seriously
- Take vacations, and work hard when you come back