

## Thrivecast Episode 36: Transitioning from Trainee to Faculty

**Trish Kritek:** [00:00:00] Welcome to another episode of the University of Washington's Thrivecast, the podcast designed to help School of Medicine faculty thrive. I'm Trish Kritek, and today we're joined by Dr. Hugo Carmona. Dr. Carmona is an assistant professor in the Department of Medicine, division of pulmonary critical care and sleep medicine like me.

And he is also the associate program director for the Pulmonary Critical Care Fellowship, the program from which he recently graduated. And that's actually why I invited Hugo to talk with us today, because it's July and it's the time of year when lots of people are transitioning from their training program to becoming faculty.

And I thought it would be fun, interesting, informative to talk about that transition from fellowship or sometimes residency to faculty. So Hugo, thanks for joining us today to talk about that big transition. [00:01:00]

**Hugo Carmona:** Thanks for having me, Trish.

**Trish Kritek:** Yeah, it's my pleasure and I think this is something that happens every year, and we don't talk about it that much.

So I'm going to start off a little bit lighthearted and say, it's a big deal to finish fellowship and become a faculty member. So I'm curious, did you do anything special to mark the transition from fellow to faculty? Did you celebrate, did you do anything to mark that next phase of your career?

**Hugo Carmona:** Yeah, it was an exciting time and the best piece of advice I received was to take time off. So I thankfully had the privilege, that my wife was still working so we could afford it. And so I took two months off between the graduation time and starting officially on faculty. And that was really fabulous because, we got to do a couple of local trips and do some backpacking and hiking, which we really loved.

Did some bike packing as well but also I really love hobbies and housework and we had just recently bought a [00:02:00] house knowing that we were staying for my faculty time. And so, it was basically two months of just getting to work on my house and do house projects and that was a lot of fun for me.

So, that was really great.

**Trish Kritek:** That's great. I love it. So you did the kind of Pacific Northwesty vacationy stuff and then you nested in your new home, and I think those are great ways to kind of get yourself settled and refreshed as you enter into this next chapter. As you started to kind of get ready for your first day as an attending, is there anything else you did just to prepare for this new job that you were entering into?

**Hugo Carmona:** You know, other than just sitting and being nervous, no. I think, you know, the fellowship prepared us well, I think, and so I felt while nervous otherwise, I kind of knew what I was going to get into. And so other than a couple of kind of pre-meetings with some trusted mentors, asking a couple of questions, for the most part I was just going to take it as it as it came. And so, yeah, I didn't do anything else specifically.

**Trish Kritek:** I appreciate that. I think some of those meetings with [00:03:00] mentors are good. I also think that sometimes you don't know what's different until you've been in the new role for a little while, and then coming back to ask questions can be helpful.

So now you've had some time as a faculty member and as you kind of now reflect back on that, what are some of the bigger differences between being a fellow, being a trainee, and being a faculty member? That kind of helps people who are entering into this to think about those differences.

**Hugo Carmona:** One of the biggest differences was the timing issue, just kind of that my time is much more my own, and in a sense this was a bigger challenge for me.

So, you know, as a trainee, both as a resident, as a fellow, our schedule is fairly packed and so you just don't have that much time for extracurricular work, academic work, et cetera. And the fact that now so much more of my time was my own, even to the point of where I get to try to schedule within the division when I'm going to have, my weeks on service, et cetera. So that whole planning perspective was a [00:04:00] lot different and was a little bit overwhelming. And I think it was a skill I needed to work on somewhat. So yeah, I think the biggest difference for me was really that time was much more of my own and I needed to figure out a different way of managing it than I had in the past.

**Trish Kritek:** I think that's really a great take home, and I think everyone I know who's transitioned from being a trainee to being a faculty member has cited that in their top three because you go from being planned all the time to having a lot of planned stuff, but a lot more space for the rest of your life, but also for the other stuff you're going to do as a faculty member.

So now that you've done it for a little while, what have you started to do as an approach to structuring that time and, and how do you. How do you make sure that you're kind of balancing the efforts that you put into the different parts of your job? And you can talk through your personal experience on that, and I think it'll give some insights into how those different chunks of your job can fit together.

**Hugo Carmona:** Yeah, definitely one of the things [00:05:00] learned about myself with this process was that I definitely thrive in the much more structured environment, for example, of medicine, of training. My wife is a PhD and I've learned very quickly that I would not do as well in a PhD program because they require these skills that I clearly have not developed as well.

This, you know, the ability to self plan and manage my own time better. So what I tried doing was kind of restructuring my time in a way that allowed for some kind of external controls to help me manage my time. So that included things like setting up meetings with certain people, with stakeholders for my projects, et cetera.

And thus, I knew I had some kind of externally imposed deadlines for myself. That was one of the things. The other big thing that I found is that I was getting what I would call, getting busy doing nothing. So even I thought I used to get a lot of emails as a trainee, I get so many more emails now and I could spend a whole morning [00:06:00] just working on my emails and making my inbox great.

And feeling like I've really planned about planning and planning and then nothing has happened. And so I've had to learn to cut down that kind of work as well.

**Trish Kritek:** Okay, so I'm going to highlight a couple things you said, which are great. One is that booking some meetings or putting some things in that kind of schedule your day and also make you accountable to getting stuff done was one strategy.

And I think that's a great one, and I think something I still do for sure. And then the second one is email can be explosive when you become a faculty member and it can take up a lot of time. So developing a strategy for managing email and not letting yourself get sucked into it all day is a really good one.

And I think this is something we've talked about in other podcasts, but that taking the time to develop a strategy around email is a really good thing to think about early in your career. I'm going to ask more about time because I think this is actually like a big one. I think the other thing that starts to happen when you become a faculty member is people start asking you to join[00:07:00] different efforts. And for you, I'm going to guess that they got efforts around different committees or a task force or working groups and probably a lot of opportunities to teach because you're an educator. So did, did that happen? And if so, what have you learned about managing those asks? I think that happens to a lot of early career faculty members.

**Hugo Carmona:** Oh yeah, for sure, so yes, I've gotten a lot of requests, thankfully for people, uh, wanting to promote me, to gimme sponsorship, to help me out in terms of, uh, giving me different committee opportunities, teaching opportunities, and that's been really great. And again, I think the other kind of big thing I learned was really this point that people talk about, about saying yes and no to certain things.

That's definitely still something I'm refining. And you know, when you asked me earlier about fellowship into faculty transition, I thought I was going to be better at this than I thought. I had spent some time as a fellow working with my mentors, thinking about the kinds of things I should say yes to, the kinds of things I should [00:08:00] say no to.

And then I hit faculty time and most of that went out the window and I said yes to a lot of things. And it was great. And I've had a lot of fun and that's been great, but it's very easy to just do things that are bringing you joy, bringing you happiness, but aren't necessarily cohesive.

And you got to, you do have to find a balance. If you have other goals that you also want to achieve, like promotion or, you know, working on bigger projects that they're going to take longer and meet and require you to have that time.

**Trish Kritek:** I think that those are good points and I think it's okay to say yes early in your career.

That's how you find the things that you want to kind of invest in and spend more time in and maybe make bigger projects. And it can be an overwhelming number of things to say yes to. So sometimes you say yes and then you say, but not anymore. We're not going to keep doing this and that, that works too.

But I really appreciate how, even with best intentions about, I'm going to be focused on saying yes to these things, no, to these things, it's [00:09:00] easy when you start as a faculty member probably, because you have more time. That's flexible probably because you're excited and people are giving you opportunities to kind of say yes to too much.

So I think that's a good thing to remind people about. Did you have a strategy for saying no?

**Hugo Carmona:** Yes. I've developed one and it involves my mentors. So I really, in my second year of faculty, I've learned this more, which was I started utilizing my mentors more to help me kind of refine where I should be putting some efforts after, after thinking about my goals.

You know, so I've, I meet with my mentors. I think about with them through what are my goals in the future, and thus now thinking about, as I add on new things to my schedule, how do those help me get to my goal? Maybe they don't help me get to my goal, but they're just a really fun thing that are going to bring me joy and I want to do them and are a thing that, you know what?

As much as I would love to, it's just not going to get me to either of those. And maybe it's a thing I can say no to. And then I can always rely and say, you [00:10:00] know, I spoke about this with my mentorship committee, or one of my mentors. I would love to be part of that, but at this time, it's just not right for me.

I'm working on a version of that for my saying no.

**Trish Kritek:** I think that's great. I think highlighting that mentors are super helpful when you get out of fellowship and are in your career as a faculty member. I still hang on to some of the mentors I've had for a really long time now, and I really like that technique of, I talked about this with my mentors, and I think that that's a nice strategy to share with other people.

So, nice. The other parts. I mean, I think time is probably the biggest thing, but are there other places where things felt different as a faculty member versus as a fellow? And, maybe that not everyone who's listening as a clinician, but I'm curious about in the clinical spaces, did it feel different?

**Hugo Carmona:** It did feel different. Well, in some ways, it surprisingly didn't feel different. So I had as much imposter syndrome as an early faculty, as I did as a fellow that, you know, the graduating to faculty [00:11:00] didn't make that go away. And I kind of anticipated that that was the case, and yet it still felt just as bad that I had.

So I would say that that's just kind of one of the things I noticed about it. The other is, I had a very clear style for myself as a fellow because thankfully in my fellowship program, you know, the fellows are meant to be the junior faculty. They're meant to be the ones running the teams, being the leaders of the teams, being the educational leaders of the team.

And so for me, that was really well defined. I had worked on that for many years. That was all great for me as a faculty wanting to give that opportunity to the fellow, and yet also trying to find my space in that. That was not something I was prepared as much for. And it is something I've been working on as well as to find my style around.

**Trish Kritek:** Oh, I appreciate both of those a lot. So the first one is you're still like, hmm, am I really the attending? And I remember having exactly that same thought. I also remember being a little bit more cautious when I, all of a sudden wasn't attending than I had been when I was a fellow, [00:12:00] because I was suddenly like, had my name on somebody's wristband and I was like, whoa.

So I can relate to that as well. The other one I really also resonates with me is like, how do you step as an early career attending step back enough to let the fellow or the residents or whomever kind of have a chance to lead? And that's really hard. I think I remember my very first block as an attending.

I asked my fellow, what can I do to be more helpful? And his answer was, you can leave for a little while. It was very sobering and accurate, and so I started to do it, but I think that's a hard one early on, particularly as you're just kind of building your trust in yourself as an attending to also give up that control and hand it over to the fellow.

So I think still working on year two is not surprising at all.

**Hugo Carmona:** Yeah. And you know, I've incorporated it into my kind of, early week, you know, my shifts are a week long. And so I spend time with the fellow at the beginning of the week talking about [00:13:00] expectations and whatnot. And I've started incorporating that into my kind of talk with them that, hey, I recognize I'm still early in this.

Or, I still am having a little bit of trouble letting go or making space, you know, help me with that. And I apologize if I step on your toes sometimes. We'll find a way of making this work. And I think that's going well.

**Trish Kritek:** I bet that they really appreciate that and I think that kind of direct like insight is super helpful.

Okay, so as you said, you've had a couple years as an attending, and so now when you look back over those two years, you've given some insights into kind of places where you had some learnings, but is there anything that you would have done differently as you look back over the last two years and that kind of earliest phase of being an attending or being a faculty member?

**Hugo Carmona:** You know, other than what we've talked about, I got to say thankfully, not too much. I felt really privileged and thankful that I had such great mentors because really that's what allowed me in my first and now second year for it to not be a shocking experience. It's still been challenging, of course, and there are still things that [00:14:00] I'm working on and skills that I'm developing and, as we've talked about, things that I was a little bit surprised by and, whatnot, but, the fact that I was able to spend a lot of time with my mentors and other people ahead of time planning, thinking about what these years might look like, allowed me, I think to, you know, just have a pleasant transition experience.

And so it's been a really great experience. I haven't had too many things that I've kind of went down the road and said, hmm, I regret doing this, this was a problem.

**Trish Kritek:** That's great. I'm super excited to hear that. And that maybe is an inspiration for folks who are not quite at that transition point to spend that time building those relationships with mentors who can help you with kind of getting those skills geared up.



So when you hit the ground running as a faculty member, it's a little easier. Is there something that's a particular joy of this new phase of your career being an attending? Is there something that stands out to you of being a faculty member?

**Hugo Carmona:** Yeah, I mean, I think my biggest joy is working with the fellows, that for sure [00:15:00] is just the best.

You know, as a fellow, I actually didn't get to work as much with my co-fellows. Because, you know, we're all in individually on our own services, but I got to work with a lot of great residents and faculty and that's just been even better as a faculty member because I get to work with all of the fellows throughout the year.

I get to work with a lot of the residents throughout the year, so that's for sure my biggest joy. The other kind of big joy is that I get to work even more with my faculty colleagues that's, you know, on a kind of academic level beyond just a clinical level. And that's been fantastic.

So I think those two provide a lot of job satisfaction for me and are, you know, part of what definitely allowed me to thrive.

**Trish Kritek:** That's great. Well, I think you've already shared a bunch of pearls. I'm wondering if you have any last words to folks who are, probably this week, or maybe they're wise like you and taking two months off and coming in, you know, in September, but are about to become new faculty members.

Is there anything else that you would say, hey, [00:16:00] here's one last thing that I think you should think about as you enter to the enter this next chapter?

**Hugo Carmona:** Yeah, I think in addition to the kind of couple points I've mentioned around, you know, mentorship and all that, one of my other hobbies is financial planning and reading about personal finance, and I spent a lot of time in each of my transition points from residency to fellowship, from fellowship to faculty thinking about what my financial plan is going to be with me and my wife.

How we're going to be working on, you know, this new income that we're going to have coming in, being good stewards of that, how is that going to affect our future goals, our travel goals, our retirement goals, all of that. And



today it's just so easy to either do it yourself if you have an interest in learning about it or paying not too much for a financial planner.

And then I know resources through UW. I think that's really important because, you know, that is just such an important part of our lives that doesn't get talked about enough, but really impacts our ability to do other things that we want to do in our lives.

**Trish Kritek:** Thank you for saying that. I do an orientation for new faculty and one of the things I say is, [00:17:00] it seems crazy if you're just starting a brand new job, but you should be planning for your retirement and this is the time to think about it.

Kudos to you for caring enough to read and learn, but as you said, there's people you can pay, not a huge sum of money to help you. So, completely agree, and now is the time. It's perfect to think about it just as you start in your first job as a faculty member. So thank you for highlighting that.

You may have people following up with you now that you've said you like to think about that.

**Hugo Carmona:** Always happy to talk.

**Trish Kritek:** Oh, well that's good. Hugo, I think there was a lot here for people to learn from and I think that you scattered a lot of different pearls about kind of this transition and ways to make it as positive as it sounds like yours has been, which is great to hear.

So thank you so much for joining us today.

**Hugo Carmona:** Thank you so much for having me.

**Trish Kritek:** And for all of you listening, if you want to listen to more episodes of Thrivecast, you can find them at Apple Podcast, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcast. [00:18:00] You can also always find them at the UW School of Medicine faculty website at [faculty.uwmedicine.org](http://faculty.uwmedicine.org).

Thanks for listening and have a great day.