

Clinical Pearl:

Young and Old and Your Academic Career in Medicine

Joseph R. Hageman, MD

*"When you are young, you try to make your way...
When you are old, you try to prove you still have something to contribute" (me).*

I had finished my fellowship in neonatology and gotten a job at the hospital of my dreams with a wonderful group of mentors, nurses, respiratory therapists, and clerks. I had a research lab and was asking what we thought were good research questions. I was making my way and was an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics... first in the research and then in the clinical track. I was very active, clinically, and pretty productive as an author...I won the teacher of the year one year from the residents from Children's Memorial Hospital, Northwestern University. I was making my way to Clinical Professor of Pediatrics as well. I got some chronic illness that resulted in not being able to continue practicing as a pediatric hospitalist and pediatric intensivist, apnea doc anymore, and had to retire clinically.

But thanks to the support from my family, friends, colleagues, I was able to reinvent myself. And medicine still had so much to offer! The affiliation changed and I had the opportunity to teach medical students, residents, and fellows from the University of Chicago, and again, thanks to friends and colleagues, I began going to Comer Children's Hospital to teach and help residents with their research projects and became the director of pediatric resident research. Still making my way...but not so young anymore. Fifty-seven years old but still full of life. Thirty national presentations by the residents and over 100 published papers, all but a few were case-based reviews, small case series but a few published in mid-impact level journals. First publications for a lot of the authors.... it was a lot of fun.

"I lost it for about 10 minutes, but thanks to my friends and colleagues, and five shocks, I got it back...at age 62. After five years at Comer and U of Chicago, I got the chance to be Director of NICU Quality Improvement at Comer Children's Hospital."

I lost it for about 10 minutes, but thanks to my friends and colleagues, and five shocks, I got it back...at age 62. After five years at Comer and U of Chicago, I got the chance to be Director of NICU Quality Improvement at Comer Children's Hospital. I am still teaching medical students how to present history and physical examinations. I have the opportunity to be the editor in chief of Pediatric Annals and serve on the editorial board of NeoReviews (2012-2018) and now, Neonatology Today.

Today, almost 68 years old next month, and just finished a couple of national QI presentations and am publishing an editorial and a clinical pearl each month. Over 250 publications, of which the last 160 have been in the last ten years since I have been trying to prove I still have something to contribute.

I am also working as a mentor with the NICU and mother-baby, and obstetrical nurses, neonatal nurse practitioners, as we work on QI projects about safe sleep, and projects for those nurses who are in graduate school for doctorates as nurse practitioners. I have also felt honored to be able to work with the nurses, since the time I was a new faculty member in 1983 at Evanston Hospital in the Infant Special Care Unit trying to make my way, till now, when I am still trying to prove I have something to contribute.

BYW, I am a senior clinician-educator, Pritzker School of Medicine, University of Chicago, and it has not slowed me down at all. I do have the advantage of having 37 (1982-2019) years of experience as an attending pediatrician...reinventing myself with lots of help and support along the way...and still going strong. Parenthetically, I am also still a Professor Emeritus of Pediatrics, as well. I repeat that to myself on a regular basis and when I am asked to write letters of support for your pediatricians who are trying to make their way.... And for some older pediatricians who are working toward promotion in the clinical tracks of their universities.

The major point to be made for those of you who are my colleagues in various stages of your academic careers in medicine is, no matter what challenges you may face along the way, and no matter how you find that you have to reinvent yourself, you still do have something to contribute!

I am reading a book entitled ["The Eureka Factor: Aha Moments, Creative Insight, and the Brain"](#) by Cognitive Neuroscientists, [John Kounios](#) and Mark Beeman and the question I keep asking myself is, is this an "aha moment, the result of creative insight, or analytic thought"...a process that has led me to this conclusion?

That is, the quote that I came up with early one morning a few weeks ago and it was after I started reading this book...

The way Kounios and Beeman describe an "aha moment or creative insight" seemed consistent with how this quote popped into my mind, and at the same time, the quote sounds like the conclusion of an analytic process based on 37 years of experience and thought.

Here is how the authors, neuroscientists Kounios and Beeman, define an aha moment or creative insight: "they have two key features. The first one is they pop into your awareness, seemingly out of nowhere. They don't feel like the product of your ongoing thoughts...they yield a different way of looking at things" (1).

What is also really interesting is how they describe the "more

gradual, conscious process that cognitive psychologists call 'analytic' thought. This involves methodically and deliberately considering many possibilities until you find a solution" (1).

References:

1. Kounios J, Beeman M. *The Eureka factor: Aha moments, creative insight, and the brain*. New York: Penguin Random House. P. 7.
2. *Ibid.* p. 10.

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Corresponding Author



Joseph R. Hageman, MD
Senior Clinician Educator
Pritzker School of Medicine
University of Chicago
MC6060
5841 S. Maryland Ave.
Chicago, IL 60637
Phone: 773-702-7794
Fax: 773-732-0764
jhageman@peds.bsd.uchicago.edu

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1250 word limit not including references or title page.

May begin with a brief case summary or example.

Summarize the pearl for emphasis.

No more than 7 references.

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jhageman@peds.bsd.uchicago.edu