



Name: Megan L. Alder

Degree: PhD, RN

Title: Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Graduation Year: 2017

What is the day in the life like at your job? What are typical job responsibilities for someone in this role?

Megan L. Alder, PhD, RN – Dr. Alder is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Marcus Autism Center in Atlanta, Georgia at Emory University School of Medicine in the Department of Pediatrics. Her research focuses on sleep and feeding issues in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). She recently graduated from Case Western Reserve University Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing in May of 2021 with her PhD in Nursing. Dr. Alder is currently the principal investigator for a study aimed to learn more about health and quality of life in children with ASD. This study will include up to 300 children between the ages of 2 to 10 years who receive a diagnosis of ASD at the Marcus Autism Center. In this study, families will receive a multidisciplinary feeding evaluation with a dietician, nurse practitioner, and psychologist to determine the prevalence of feeding issues in young children with ASD.

What do you love about your job?

My job is very rewarding. Each day I improve the health-related quality of life of children with ASD and their caregivers by advancing nursing science and care. I get to travel to research conferences both nationally and internationally to present my findings. I also serve as a Co-Chair on the Emerging Scholars Network Executive Board for the Midwest Nursing Research Society. A research career is both rewarding and flexible. I can write one day and fly to a conference the next day. I also see families in the multidisciplinary feeding clinic for eight hours each week. I love being able to see families on a weekly basis in addition to my role as a nurse scientist.

What is challenging about your role?

The training pathway for a Nurse Scientist is three to five years and is difficult for individuals who are not willing to move to a different city or have families or children at home to take care of. To be a nurse scientist, you need to complete a three-to-four-year PhD program. To advance to a research-intensive or a high-research activity (R1) university, a one-to-two-year postdoctoral fellowship is recommended. Nurse scientists need to make sure they maintain a healthy work-life balance, or they can experience burnout just like any other nursing profession.

What are the benefits of working in this field?

Nurse scientists utilize the nursing metaparadigm – person, health, environment, and nursing – to advance the nursing discipline and profession. Each day a nurse scientist transforms practice, advances our understanding of diseases and conditions, and improves health-related quality of life.

What experiences did you have that prepared you for this role? What types of activities were you involved in at Lipscomb or during college that helped developed your skills? And/or what about your first jobs helped you obtain a more desired career?

I obtained a prestigious award from the Dean at Case Western Reserve University Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing in Cleveland, Ohio that provided full tuition support for up to five years (up to \$250,000) and \$6,000 educational allowance per academic year. In the PhD program, I was part of an elite group of graduate students. I had the ability to train at the Summer Genetics Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). I went to over six conferences in the PhD program. I traveled across the United States to visit friends and colleagues that share my research interests. I was accepted in top nursing programs to pursue a postdoctoral fellowship position. I highly recommend pursuing a PhD in nursing and promise that you will not regret it!

What do you see happening in the future for these types of careers?

Nurse scientists are critical to advancing the nursing discipline. In the future, I see more programs incorporating nursing research within the nursing curriculum starting at the undergraduate level.

What advice do you have for a student considering a career in your profession?

You can get an MSN and/or DNP and a PhD if you want to practice in the clinic and do research. A PhD primarily prepares you for an academic medicine or tenure-track professor position; however, you can accomplish almost anything with a PhD. With a PhD, you can work at a School of Nursing, School of Medicine, School of Engineering, hospitals, etc. With a PhD there is no limit to what you can do. A PhD is an exceptionally rewarding degree. Most importantly, I encourage you to pursue what you are passionate in. Research has always been my top interest for a career; therefore, the journey has been immensely rewarding. I am happy to answer any questions you have about Nursing PhD programs or a nurse scientist career pathway. My email is megan.lynn.alder@emory.edu.