Professor Bankole Johnson

Job title: Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry, University of Maryland

Job description

Professor Johnson researches the neuroscience of addiction, including the mechanisms of how addiction works in the brain and **new treatments to cure addictions.**

Can you tell us a little bit about your job? What does an average day look like for you?

On a lab day, I get up late and try to decide, what are the ideas I'd like to think about today. I write them out and then share them with colleagues and find out if someone has done anything on this before. Then I decide to either do the experiment or catalogue it. After lunch I come back to the molecular lab, then attend a clinical meeting. In the late afternoon I work on papers and articles. On other days I set my agenda on the way to work, meet with my team and make sure they know what they need to. Neuroscience is a team sport. Most of the work is done talking with people to really understand what you've decided to do.

How did you start on your path to a career in STEM and what did that path look like?

I actually did everything I could to avoid going to medical school. I saw myself going into the field of the arts, history or law, but my father wanted me to be a doctor. In fact, I was actually tricked into it. I was 16 at the time and my mother and I took a trip up to Scotland just to visit the University of Glasgow campus, or so she said. During a conversation we were having with the Dean, he mentioned that "you'll be going" and that's when I knew that we weren't just visiting. As I watched my mother's train pull away from the station, I just knew that my life as I knew it was ruined. So my love of medicine was turned on through time and during my second year in medical school I began to like it.

What would you say to young folks who are thinking about a career in STEM?

Do it if you are prepared to be fascinated.

Do you have any STEM heroes?

Philip Cowen, a professor of psychopharmacology at Oxford. I thanked him once for everything he'd taught me and he replied "I didn't teach you anything." He was a great scientist. The way he taught was different; he wanted to talk about things, to hear the story, to find out why it's interesting. He said that if you really feel and believe in something, then you have a story.