PGCert Clinical Bioinformatics

An interview with...

Constantinos Savva
Specialist Registrar in
Medical Oncology
Southampton, UK

Our Postgraduate Certificate in Clinical Bioinformatics is the perfect course for healthcare professionals who want to upskill in this crucial and fast-growing field. With course material and case studies drawn directly from real-world clinical scenarios, students can apply their knowledge directly into their workplaces. We spoke to Dr Constantinos Savva, a Registrar who studied Unit 3 of the PGCert as a CPD unit, about his background, what drove him to choose the course and advice for balancing work with study.

A SKILLS UPGRADE

As a Specialist Registrar in Medical Oncology and a Clinical Research Fellow in Cancer Sciences, Constantinos was already well acquainted with genomics. Having previously taken some modules in statistics, he wanted to find a course that would allow him to upskill and increase his sequencing ability.

"I'm currently working on my PhD where I study the immune responses in patients with breast cancer," he tells us, "my project involves immunohistochemistry, but also involves bioinformatics and, specifically, I've done some targeted RNA sequencing."

Through taking the Introduction to Programming CPD – Unit 3 of the PGCert in Clinical Bioinformatics, he aimed to further develop skills that would help him get the most out of both his research and continuing medical career.

"I have some background in statistics, having previously attended a few online seminars and courses on bioinformatics, so I thought this course would help me consolidate that knowledge and learn how to effectively write code in relation to genetic data," Constantinos says.

The course being delivered completely online meant Constantinos could tailor his study around his professional commitments, allowing him to develop his knowledge whilst working. The course material includes real-life case studies from Manchester Centre for Genomic Medicine, ensuring that students acquire the latest knowledge to apply in their workplace.

COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT

One major highlight of studying the Introduction to Programming CPD was the opportunity to work across disciplines. Medical and science professionals from various backgrounds take the PGCert in Clinical Bioinformatics and CPD units.

"There were people from different backgrounds, for instance one colleague of mine is a physicist," he tells us, "another colleague of mine is a biologist with expertise in genetics and another is a PhD student in cancer research."

Constantinos found that working closely with course colleagues from varied roles was very enriching. "I enjoyed the fact that we were divided into teams and the interactions I had with the other team members were great," Constantinos says, "we were able to learn from each other."

The Course Director also took part in discussions, which Constantinos found helpful. The extra level of expertise provided helped to guide the topics and enhance the learning experience. Constantinos also enjoyed a supportive environment from both peers and the academics teaching the course.

FURTHER STUDY

Studying individual units of the PGCert in Clinical Bioinformatics could be the right choice for many professionals who have a specific skills gap they wish to address. Constantinos chose to study Unit 3 on its own due to having already covered some elements of the PGCert in previous study.

However, on reflection, Constantinos says he would have benefited from studying the other units, particularly as Units 1 and 2 focus on bioinformatics specifically. "The introduction to Unit 3 would have been smoother if I attended Units 1 and 2," he muses, "retrospectively, I think it would have been better for me to attend the other units as well, so that there would have been continuity in the learning process."

With relevant experience it is possible to take a CPD unit and if you realise you'd like to learn more, take the other units and build up to the full PGCert.

BALANCING WORK AND EDUCATION

As a working professional who was also completing a PhD alongside studying the CPD, at first Constantinos found it challenging to strike the right work-study balance.

"We have to spend a few hours every day, especially during the first sections of the module to learn how to code and other aspects of the Python programming language. It was difficult because I work full-time and I had do it out of hours or over the weekend," he admits.

With many people who study alongside work, commitments can often lead to sudden changes in plans and schedules. Constantinos was happy that the flexible nature of study in this course took this into account. What's more, his teachers were attentive and accommodating.

"They offer a lot of support and they tailor it according to the needs of each student," Constantinos tells us, "there is enough support to catch up, with many resources available in order to cover any potential gaps."

Constantinos is excited about integrating his learning into his work and has already begun to share his skills with others. This collaboration is the spirit of the PGCert in Clinical Bioinformatics, which develops expertise that professionals can use to enhance not just their own role but others' too.

"The learning process has been fantastic," Constantinos tells us, "I was able to transfer the knowledge that I gained via the course to my colleagues – that was a really good element of this module."

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UK

Tel: +44(0)7785 414 245