

# 5 Physician Thought Leaders Share Their Advice for Breaking Into Clinical Research

Introduction by Arthur C. Lee, MD

Featuring Venita Chandra, MD, Brant Ullery, MD, Sonya Noor, MD, Linda Harris, MD, and Jesse Kane, MD.

When it comes to shaping the future of medicine, few paths are as rewarding — or as challenging — as research. I have spent my career as an interventional cardiologist focused on treating and preventing heart disease and limb loss through innovative interventions from a multidisciplinary approach. After my time at Mount Sinai in New York City, I joined The Cardiac & Vascular Institute (TCVI) in Gainesville, Florida, as Director of Peripheral Vascular Services. Along the way, I have been fortunate to be involved in clinical trials and research to push the boundaries of what is possible in cardiology and vascular medicine.

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Below, we explore some practical advice on getting involved in clinical trials that accomplished cardiologists and vascular surgeons have shared in interviews with FastWave Medical. I hope their insights are inspiring and pave the way for more collaborative research efforts in medicine.

## Find What Intrigues You and Pursue It

**Dr. Venita Chandra** is board-certified in both general and vascular surgery. She is a clinical professor of surgery in the Division of Vascular Surgery at Stanford University Medical Center. She also serves as the co-medical director of the Stanford Advanced Wound Care Center and the program director of the Vascular Surgery Fellowship and Vascular Surgery Residency Programs at the Stanford University School of Medicine. Venita specializes in cutting-edge approaches to aortic aneurysmal disease, peripheral vascular disease, and limb salvage.

“The classic notion of a surgeon-scientist, who excels in both surgery and basic science lab research,

is largely outdated,” notes Dr. Venita Chandra. This requires having 48 hours in a day, and it is not realistic. Dr. Chandra recognized that trying to fit into this mold — balancing high-level surgery and lab research — wasn't for her. Instead, she focused on asking simple, meaningful questions in her field. And it paid off; today she is a well-published surgeon.

Dr. Chandra emphasizes the value of simple, methodical inquiries over grandiose, complex projects. “Any simple question, if approached methodically and scientifically, could lead to interesting research,” she says.

A great example is her work with Stanford's Wound Care Center. She wanted to know if the center was truly achieving better outcomes, like reducing the need for major amputations for patients with conditions such as diabetic foot ulcers and peripheral artery disease.

To understand this, Dr. Chandra conducted a straightforward study comparing patient outcomes before and after the center's opening. This simple question turned into a project that earned her a spot on the podium at the Society for Vascular Surgery (SVS) and multiple publications. As she puts it, “It was the easiest study because it was interesting, and I literally wanted to answer that question for myself.”

Dr. Chandra's advice is summed up as follows: don't feel pressured to “think big” or tackle overly complex research. Focus on projects that are interesting, digestible, and meaningful to you. For her, impactful research doesn't have to be “rocket science or next-generation science” — it just has to be something you genuinely want to explore.

## Get Involved with the ‘Behind the Scenes’ of Clinical Research

**Dr. Brant Ullery** is the Medical Director of Vascular and Endovascular Surgery at the Providence Heart and Vascular Institute, Oregon. His expertise lies in innovative endovascular aortic interventions and complex aortic and branch vessel reconstructions.

Dr. Ullery brings a refreshing perspective to clinical research, especially for those who aren't based in traditional academic settings. He says, “You'd be surprised; a lot of meaningful clinical research, including clinical trials, is increasingly performed outside the traditional academic settings.”

As a renowned vascular surgeon in community practice, Dr. Ullery emphasizes that valuable research doesn't only happen within universities and teaching hospitals. His advice for those considering research is to start by getting to know their local Institutional Review Board (IRB) representatives and research coordinators. In his experience, they are “a gold mine of knowledge.” Understanding the full scope of a research trial — from the early planning phases to budgeting and meeting IRB requirements — provides a “clear-eyed view of what modern research looks like.”

He also touches on the behind-the-scenes work that goes into launching and conducting a study. Regardless of whether you're in an academic environment or a community practice, being aware of these processes is crucial. Meaningful and impactful research is accessible as long as you are willing to engage with the right people and processes from the start.

## Find the Right Mentors

**Dr. Sonya Noor** brings a wealth of experience from India, Canada, and the U.S., thanks to her global medical training and her passion for vascular care. She leads her own practice at the Buffalo Endovascular and Vascular Surgical Associates (BEVSA), with two locations in New York. Dr. Noor is also the Medical Director of Endovascular Services at Buffalo General Medical Center and Gates Vascular Institute and is the Vascular Director at the Jacobs Institute.

Dr. Noor highlights the advantage of working in a hybrid environment that combines private practice with academic collaboration. At her hospital, which is privately owned but works closely with a university department, she enjoys clinical practice, teaching, and research as part of her work. “We see a high number of patients and we also teach residents and fellows,” she explains. This setting allows her to engage in research and publish articles without being a full-time academic.

One thing that opened doors for Dr. Noor to interviews and publications was being a strong communicator. But aside from looking for ways to improve your skills as a doctor, she emphasizes that for younger professionals, having the support of senior colleagues is crucial. She shares that opportunities often arise when a senior partner can't attend a meeting and suggests a junior colleague instead. “It's a great way to get involved without having to work your way up the traditional ladder,” she notes.

Carrying on the tradition, Dr. Noor believes in the philosophy of “lifting as you rise.” If she can't attend a meeting or event, she often recommends a promising young professional from a related specialty to take her place, just as her mentors did for her.

## Build on Your Experience

Having joined the University of Buffalo Medical Doctor (UBMD) Surgery in 1995, **Dr. Linda Harris** now serves as a Professor of Surgery with tenure in the Department of Surgery. A double board-certified

surgeon in Vascular and General Surgery, she has illuminated the medical world with 68 publications and countless presentations, and has been the recipient of 21 distinct awards and honors.

Dr. Harris advises starting with a clear focus on an area where you not only have a genuine passion but also a sufficient clinical caseload. “If you love aortic disease but rarely see it, you are unlikely to be able to do good clinical research in that area,” she points out.

For getting started in clinical trials, Dr. Harris suggests ensuring you have the clinical volume to support a study and then finding a company willing to collaborate. She recommends leveraging professional connections, such as mentors and colleagues, to facilitate these introductions. Linda also highlights the need for a clinical coordinator, even a part-time one, to help you manage the logistics of research.

Networking plays a significant role in breaking into clinical research. Dr. Harris encourages fellows to engage with industry professionals at regional and national meetings. “Collaborative research usually begins with identifying common interests and initiating conversations,” she says. By participating and presenting ideas, young professionals

can increase their visibility and open doors to future clinical trials and research partnerships.

She also offers a realistic perspective on the challenges of applying for research grants, noting that it’s rare to be funded on the first attempt. “Almost every accomplished researcher will face rejections before success,” she notes. For that, persistence and strategic networking are key to establishing a solid foothold in clinical research.

### **Reach Out to the Authors You Admire**

**Dr. Jesse Kane** is the Assistant Professor of Medicine and an interventional cardiologist at the University of Vermont Medical Center and a former athlete who captained the Israeli National Men’s Lacrosse team — establishing the sport in Israel during his medical studies at Tel Aviv University. His research and interests focus on the optimal management of complex coronary disease and interventional complications.

Dr. Kane breaks down the process of getting involved in clinical research into a few steps, starting with immersing yourself in the literature: “Reading what others are publishing in the literature and understanding how they do it and what they’re looking at is really important.” This familiarizes

you with current trends and techniques while introducing you to researchers behind the work and what drives them.

Networking is another critical aspect Dr. Kane highlights. He suggests connecting with mentors and finding people whose research you admire. “Find people you want to train with, who you respect, whose research you really love, and then work with them.” He also suggests reaching out to corresponding authors. “A lot of these publications have the person’s email right there,” he says. By contacting authors directly, as he did with mentors like Drs. Kate Kearney and Bill Lombardi, you can express your interest and start building meaningful professional relationships, which are essential for getting your foot in the door.

However, Dr. Kane stresses that it’s not enough to simply ask for opportunities; you need to bring something to the table. “Think about how you can contribute, what skills or perspectives you bring to each research project,” he advises. Adding unique value shows initiative and makes you an attractive collaborator. ■

*Disclosures: Dr. Arthur Lee is a consultant to FastWave Medical.*