**A doctor’s dilemma**

Deniz Kirik was drawn to medicine by his desire to better understand the human brain, but he found that doctors in his native Turkey have little opportunity for research. Nonetheless, he has turned what first felt like a failed career choice into an advantage. Now a neuroscience professor at Lund University in Sweden and co-founder of a spinoff company, Kirik uses his medical background to develop novel gene-based therapies for Parkinson’s disease and bring them to the clinic. In October, Kirik secured a partnership with his regional government in southern Sweden to build a hospital specialized for testing and implementing gene therapies. This interview was edited for brevity and clarity.

**Q: How did you get into science?**

*A:* My frustration at realizing that my purpose for entering medical school clashed with what was expected of me as a medical doctor in Turkey led me to try my hand at research in my spare time. Several people on campus opened their laboratories to me. I was to start my final-year clinical residency when one of their colleagues at Lund University invited me for a short stay in his laboratory. So I took a break from medical school and, once in Sweden, stayed on for a Ph.D.

**Q: Was it hard to change course?**

*A:* My decisions were not well understood back home. My relatives called my parents lamenting that I had lost purpose in life. Even my professional colleagues seemed to think that research was the wrong path to follow. The medical faculty board threatened to dismiss me if I didn’t return. After a 4-year-long uphill battle and a lot of back-and-forth between the two countries, I eventually managed to finish my medical studies. I earned my degree to state that even though my path was different, it wasn’t any less good than medical practice.

**Q: What’s your advice for young scientists?**

*A:* Defining the purpose of their life and their ambitions is very important. Then they need to determine what path will lead them to their goals, revising it and iterating continuously. They will need a lot of strength and persistence. Also, it’s ironic, but the things that taught me the most are the things that I failed at. I’ve always investigated the reasons for my failures much more intensely than my successes, and failing drives me to try harder the next time.

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