The Mentor-Mentee Relationship

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Overview

• What is a mentor?
• Role of the mentor
  – What works in a successful mentor?
• Role of the mentee
• Promotion and Tenure considerations
• How do we cultivate mentors?
  – Grants programs
• The departmental community as mentor
• Case Studies
Mentor - Mythologic

- Homer’s *Odyssey*
- Mentor was a trusted friend of Odysseus and adviser to his son, Telemachus, as Odysseus departed for the Trojan War
Mentor - Research

• A person who takes interest in and helps a more junior person develop professionally through a combination of advising on projects, skill development, creation of opportunities and personal growth in an intensive manner over an extended period of time

• Distinct from research adviser, although can be both
Benefits of Having a Mentor

• Mentors are perceived by mentees as being important to career advancement and career satisfaction
• Presence of a mentor may have bearing in mentee’s choosing an academic career
• Apparent benefit on productivity and success

Benefits of Being Mentored

• Mentored medical school faculty
  – Better research skills
  – Better research preparation

• Mentored primary care fellows
  – More likely to publish 1 or more papers/yr
  – More likely to secure funding as PI early

However, miles to go……

• Prevalence of having a mentor ranges from 19-93%
• <50% of medical students had mentors
• Men 3× as likely as women to have a positive relationship with a mentor
• 10-32% of mentees report that their mentor used their work to further the mentor’s career rather than the mentee’s career

Expectations of the Mentor

• Help trainee choose research project(s)
  – Diversification: Balance high and low risk projects
  – Fit the project to the time frame of the trainee
• Seek out coursework to fortify skills
• Meet with trainee regularly (e.g., weekly) to review progress
• Encourage and critique – redirect projects if needed
• Give timely feedback on manuscript or grant drafts (e.g., within 1 wk)
• Advise trainee on seeking funding
• Prepare trainee for abstract presentations
• Interpret organizational rules (“navigating the local roads”)
• Advocate for the mentee
• Assign credit (e.g., first authorship) where credit is due
  – Remove mentor from authorship where appropriate
• Counsel trainee on job opportunities and negotiating
• Nurture, then set free
Attributes of a Great Mentor, According to Mentees

• Writes well
  – Macroedits
  – Microedits
• Stickler for details, yet sees the bigger picture
• Responsive - never the “rate limiting step” in mentee’s research
• Door always open, literally
• Keeps up with the literature
• Accommodates differences in personalities
• Lets trainees make their own decisions
The successful mentor.....

- Pushes mentee to develop his/her own research agenda, not the mentor’s
- If mentee works on mentor’s project(s), it’s as a stepping stone for the mentee
- Doesn’t try to create a clone out of the mentee
- Guides, but doesn’t control
- Nominates mentees for awards, important roles in national organizations
- Creates opportunities
  - Career development workshops (e.g., AGA)
- Passes on opportunistic “actionable intelligence”
  - Notifies re FOAs, RFAs
  - Refers to informative talks, lectures
  - Complements the native intelligence of the mentee
- Reads the environment
  - Spots trends in research, funding
  - Seeks out novel, enabling collaborations
  - Not afraid to reach out for help he/she can’t provide
- Matchmaking, team building skills
- Separates the worthwhile from the waste of time (committees, other potential collaborators) for the mentee
The successful mentor...

- Encourages mentees to pause and ask the “So what?” question
- Excellent teacher
- Willing to take chances
- Always encouraging
- “… knows how to inspire, motivate, congratulate, and criticize, all without creating a sense of antagonism or favoritism.”
- Selfless
- Leads by example
- Role model in balancing personal and professional lives
The successful mentor...

• Not mentee’s best friend, but takes interest in the mentee’s personal life
• Pro-active (doesn’t wait till mentee comes to him/her with problems)
• Can work with mentees whose interests do not necessarily align with mentor’s current projects
  – e.g., Langer Lab
• Attracts mentees from outside his/her field
• Leaves a long-lasting impact, well beyond the time the mentee still “needs” the mentor
Expectations of the Mentee

- Identify career plans
- Locate prospective mentors (even if not same as adviser)
- Be clear about needs and expectations and communicate them!
- Be flexible and innovative
- Focus, focus, focus!
- Be prepared when meeting with mentor
- Be responsive to mentor’s feedback

American Heart Association. Mentoring Handbook
Columbia RCR Curriculum
A good mentee....

• Identifies personal goals
• Seeks feedback
• Keeps record of his/her development/progress
• Takes responsibility for his/herself
• Remains open to new ideas and suggestions
• Uses feedback to improve performance
• Uses the mentor as a role model
• Is respectful and considerate of the mentor
Formalizing the Relationship

- Contracts specifying expectations from both parties
  - UCLA
  - Pittsburgh
  - UNC
  - Others
Mentoring Agreement Form
(To be completed by the Mentor and Mentee together)

People involved in the mentoring process:

Overall Goals for the mentoring process:

In this mentoring relationship, accountability will be determined by:

In this mentoring relationship, progress toward the overall goals will be measured by:

What is the duration of the relationship? How will you know when the relationship is at a natural end point?

Ideal schedule for the mentoring meetings (day, time, place, frequency, etc.)?

Signatures of parties involved:
The Ethics of Mentoring

• Care must be taken to avoid abuse of power by the mentor
  – Failing to assign credit for the mentee’s contributions
  – Assignment to projects that may lead to personal aggrandizement of the mentor (patents)
  – Weigh risks of work in industry-sponsored research to the trainee (e.g., large trials vs. POC)

• Abuse can also be in the form of inaction
  – Failure to advocate
How do we cultivate the mentor?

- NIH K24 program
  - Mid career award (Assoc Prof+) for patient-oriented research
- Matching programs
  - GRASP (Catalyst)
  - K24’s matched to K23, K08 grantees to assist in transition to first R01
- Directory of Mentors
- Mentorship Discussion and Workshops
- Co-mentorship
  - Increasingly important with diversification of science
  - Across disciplines
  - Strength in numbers and perspective!
- Recognize mentors with awards, incentives
- Integrate into promotion criteria or RVUs
NIH K24 – Midcareer Investigator Award for Patient-Oriented Research

• Provides support for protected time for patient-oriented research, and research mentorship
• Encourages established, mid-career clinician scientists to devote more time to patient-oriented research and to mentor beginning clinical investigators
K24 Eligibility Criteria

• Intended for clinician-investigators at Associate Professor level who have an established record of independent, peer-reviewed research grant funding
• Candidates must have independent research support at the time of application
• Candidates must demonstrate the need for protected time to advance their careers and mentoring activities
• Candidates must be willing to spend up to 50% effort (at least 25%) conducting patient-oriented research and mentoring
K24 Eligibility

• Candidates must have the opportunity to mentor (T32 fellowship programs, etc.)
• Candidates must be US citizens or permanent residents
• The institution must have a well established clinical research and career development program
• Broadening scope of translational research makes “patient-oriented” research a wider net
• We need more mentors!
K24 Application Procedure

The application must contain the following:

• Candidate information and background
• A research plan
  – SIA format (12 page)
• A mentoring plan
• Environmental and institutional commitment
• Budget
Terms of Award

- Salary: 25-50% of the candidate’s full-time salary, up to the NIH maximum
- Research Development Support: up to $50,000 per year for research expenses, travel costs, and statistical services including personnel and computer time
- Up to 5 years of support, renewable once
Further information

• Website address for more information:

• Contact NIH Program Officers – K24 Program is supported by all Institutes

• Review a successful application
  – Catalyst GRASP Program enlists Harvard area K24 grantees, who can be contacted
Promotion and Tenure Considerations

• Mentoring receives increasing consideration in new HMS promotions structure, regardless of pathway
• Maintain a careful record of trainees (Trainee Table), their publications, subsequent funding and positions
  – Stay in touch with your trainees!
• Consider obtaining letters of recommendation from trainees (once they have completed their work with you)
The Community as Mentor
“It takes a village”

- Department creates culture to support research development – use it wisely
- Research Work-in-Progress or Floor Meetings (continuous feedback)
- Seminars
- Techniques Courses
- Journal Clubs
- Practice sessions for National presentations
- Mock study sections
Mentor-Mentee Case Studies
Case 1 – Credit Check

• You were relieved and pleased that one of the most popular faculty mentors in the division that you joined as a 1st-year fellow had accepted you as a new mentee of his.

• Your first 2 years together were terrific. You completed your fellowship project, published 2 important papers from the work, and successfully got a K-award to fund the next phase of your career with this mentor listed on the K. You have continued your productivity 3 years into the K, and are now functioning more or less independently.
Case 1

• During your one-on-one mentorship session at your subspecialty’s Annual Meeting, you bring a copy of your CV

• The senior faculty with whom you are partnered reviews the CV and indicates that she is concerned that you will have trouble getting promoted because your mentor is listed as senior author on all of your papers

• She suggests that even though your mentor has been terrific, that you talk to him about not being listed as an author on the next work from your K-award so that you look more “independent”
Case 1

• You realize how much time, work, and creativity this mentor has put into your career and you feel that it is intellectually dishonest not to have him be an author. But you also realize that it is your work and you want to be promoted.
Discussion

• What should you do?
• Who should you speak to?
Case 2: the Distracted Driver

• You recently joined the fellowship of an academic division
• You joined the division chief’s lab because he had a reputation as a great mentor
• Whenever you meet, he seems distracted, taking phone calls, etc. and isn’t really helping you move your projects along
• Whenever you give him anything to read, he seems earnest, but you don’t get feedback in a timely manner.
Case 2

• It is clear to you that you need to find someone else to work with
• You would like to have an open conversation about the transition, but you also know that he has a big ego and may not look kindly on your reasons for wanting to change mentors.
• He is also your Chief, and you will need his support for a job later
Discussion

• What are your options at this point?
• What special issues arise when your mentor is also your division chief or department chair?
• Is there a way to fix the mentorship problem and still keep a positive working relationship with your boss?
Case 3 - Stranded

• One of your division’s talented MD Fellows wants to pursue fundamental investigation in a novel scientific area that’s “hot”
• He finds a basic science adviser who accepts him into his laboratory
• Two years into the experience, however, progress is slow, without a clear breakthrough
• The Fellow would like to change direction to something more translational, but the adviser feels that the Fellow is pulled away by clinical duties and needs to put more time into his work at bench
Discussion

• How do you resolve this situation?
• Could this situation have been averted? How so?
• Who acts as the mentor here?
• What are the challenges of sending fellows to high-powered labs away from your home Division?
• Role of the local co-mentor
The Fellow Advisory Committee: an added layer of mentorship

- Provides additional, impartial oversight of Fellows
- Usually 2-3 senior faculty members with convergent intellectual interest and/or senior mentorship experience
- Meet 1-2x/year with adviser(s)
- Updates on progress, troubleshooting, suggest new directions
- Committee members can act as co-mentors
- Can help defuse or pre-empt difficult situations before they take on regrettable dimensions
Summary

• Long gestation period in the creation of the successful researcher requires careful nurturing
• Mentorship becomes critical growth factor
• All trainees should have one or more mentors
  – There can not be too many!
• For those trainees headed to remote locations – essential to have local mentor and a monitoring plan
• Protect your investment
  – Diversify risk
  – Monitor your investment frequently (FAC) and reinvest midstream if necessary
• Many tools that can be used to enhance the mentor-mentee relationship, but there is no substitute for the commitment of each to the enterprise