

**Responsible Mentorship
in the Research Lab**

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Outline

1. My background
2. Overview of mentoring
3. Mentorship *malpractice*
4. Mentee *missteps*
5. Submitted questions!

Titles & Career Achievements

- Prof of Emergency Medicine & Medicine, HMS
- Prof of Epidemiology, HSPH
- Conn Chair in Emergency Medicine, MGH

- PI of many NIH, foundation, and industry grants
- >900 publications, with >56k citations (H-index 117)
- Multiple national guidelines & committees

- 2011 HMS Barger Excellence in Mentoring Award
- 2016 ACEP Outstanding Contribution to Research

My Research Path ...

- College student – alcohol & HDL ... year off
- Med student – alcohol & health ... year off x 2
- Resident – CVD epidemiology
- Research Fellow – alcohol & CVD epidemiology
- Instructor – nutrition & asthma; acute asthma in ED
- Asst Prof – respir/allergy in ED; public health in ED
- Assoc Prof – EM health policy ... vitamin D & health
- Professor – multiple topics

Emergency Medicine Network

- **Founded in 1996**
- **Mission:** To advance public health objectives through diverse projects in emergency care, particularly multicenter clinical research
- **Funding:** government, industry, foundations
- **560 peer-reviewed publications** (all age groups, diverse topics)
- www.EMNet-USA.org



Mentoring

- One (of many) definitions: *a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced-career incumbent (mentor) and beginner (mentee) aimed at promoting the career development of both*
- Many descriptions of the “ideal” mentor ...
- Much less attention to the characteristics of problematic mentors and mentees!

Healy, Educ Res 1990

Mentorship Malpractice

3 “active” phenotypes:

- **The Hijacker:** takes hostage a mentee’s ideas, projects, or grants, labelling them as his/her own for self-gain
- **The Exploiter:** torpedoes mentees’ success by saddling them with low-yield activities.
- **The Possessor:** domination of mentee

Chopra, JAMA 2016

Mentorship Malpractice (continued)

3 “passive” phenotypes:

- **The Bottleneck:** preoccupied with his/her own competing priorities and has neither bandwidth nor desire to attend to mentees
- **The Country Clubber:** wants to be everyone’s friend and evades conflict – regardless of need
- **The World Traveler:** highly successful and sought after for mtgs, talks, leadership ... has little time for mentees

Chopra, JAMA 2016

Mentorship Malpractice (continued)

Table. Diagnosing and Treating Mentorship Malpractice

Phenotype	Underlying Pathology	Diagnostic Symptoms and Signs	Complicit Mentee Acts	Potential Countermeasures	
Active Mentorship Malpractice	The Hijacker	Self-preserving behavior related to string of failures.	Academic and intellectual invariance; financial challenges, limited creativity, fear of being overtaken by others.	Sacrifice first-author positions, name mentor as principal investigator on projects.	Quick and complete exit. There is no way to protect yourself in this relationship.
	The Exploiter	Self-serving philosophy with tendency to self-worship; promotes personal interests over mentees.	Assignment of tasks such as supervising staff, managing projects unrelated to mentee. Believes mentee should be privileged to work with them.	Willing to accept nonacademic chores that support mentor rather than self.	Trial of firm boundary setting and use of additional mentors to evaluate requests. If or when mistrust ensues, exit the relationship.
	The Possessor	Anxious personality with powerful feelings of inadequacy, fears loss of mentee to others.	Specific instructions to not engage with other mentors or collaborators; constant supervision of mentee activities.	Foster isolation by following mentor demands; misinterpret undivided attention.	Insist on a mentorship committee; confront mentor with concerns regarding siloed approach.
Passive Mentorship Malpractice	The Bottleneck	Internal preoccupation coupled with limited bandwidth or interest to support mentee growth.	Often busy with own tasks or projects; limited time to meet face-to-face; inadequate response to requests for help; delays in feedback.	Allow the mentor to set timelines; facilitate behavior by silence or lack of insistence on clarity/detail.	Set firm deadlines and be clear about what happens on those deadlines; follow through with action and articulate frustration with mentor inability to prioritize.
	The Country Clubber	Conflict-avoidant personality; needs to be liked by colleagues; values social order more than mentee growth.	Avoids advocating for mentee resources such as staff; protected time; discourages mentee from similar debates.	Fail to ask mentor to advocate for mentee.	Develop a mentorship team so other mentors may engage in conflict on your behalf. Approach conflict/debate with focus on impact if not addressed.
	The World Traveler	Academic success fueling personal ambitions, travel requirements, desire for fame/appreciation.	Internationally renowned, highly sought-after for speaking engagements. Limited face-to-face time due to physical unavailability.	Accept lack of mentor availability; fail to connect with mentor via alternative methods of communication.	Establish a regular cadence of communication. Reserve time well in advance for in-person meetings. Use alternative methods for communication.

Chopra, JAMA 2016

Preventing Mentorship Malpractice

- Don't be complicit
- Set boundaries and communicate needs
- Establish a mentoring team
- Know when to walk away

Chopra, JAMA 2016

Mentee Missteps

Several extreme examples ...

- **The Overcommitter:** "yes person"
- **The Ghost:** hides from mentor
- **The Doormat:** rarely noticed but often used
- **The Vampire:** drains lifeblood of mentor (!)
- **The Lone Wolf:** "no need for mentor"
- **The Backstabber:** unable to accept blame

Vaughn, JAMA 2017

Vaughn, JAMA 2017

Phenotype	Description	Diagnostic Signs	Potential Solutions Mentee	Mentor
Conflict Averse				
The Overcommitter	Lacks the ability to say no. Ends up overcommitted and underproducing.	Resumé is filled with a host of committees, volunteer roles, etc., yet few have resulted in academic products such as publications.	Learn to use your mentor or allocated effort as a reason for saying no. Before saying yes to a project, determine which project is now getting a no.	Add new items to this mentee's list only after old ones are completed. Have mentee identify his or her career goals, then stick to projects that align.
The Ghost	Appears extremely enthusiastic and energetic, but then disappears without a trace and without notice—especially when problems arise.	Mentee may agree to assignments but fail to follow up. When questions regarding project deadlines arise, the mentee avoids discussion.	When uninterested, suggest an alternative person who may be interested. Address issues early. To reduce anxiety, be prepared with a planned solution.	Mentees should gauge their true interest in new projects and be allowed to decline. Set goals to address problems forthrightly, and praise mentees for their candor when issues raised.
The Doormat	Mentee is on the receiving end of a manipulative mentor. The mentor's energy is used for things that do not further their career, or for which they do not receive credit.	Mentee spends time on work unrelated to their own career. Review of mentee's progress shows few first-authored papers in mentee's field of interest.	Ask directly how new projects align with goals. Trial of setting goals and boundaries. Seek new mentors. Establish a mentoring committee.	Before assigning a project to a mentee, evaluate if it is in their best interest. Allow mentees to use you as an excuse not to participate in another's projects.
Confidence Lacking				
The Vampire	Mentee requires constant attention and supervision, leaving mentors drained and empty.	Mentee requests approval or clarification for every step of a project, regardless of prior or similar discussions. Lacks conviction; pivots to mirror mentor.	Recognize and embrace feelings of insecurity; talk with other junior faculty likely struggling with similar decisions. Before taking questions to a mentee, vet a solution with a colleague.	Set clear goals and boundaries, including what questions require approval and what do not. Have mentees "put their sackel down" when asking for help.
The Lone Wolf	Assertive, self-motivated, and determined; prefers working alone; believes mentorship is a luxury, not a necessity.	Does not trust others or is afraid to ask for help. Does not work well as part of a team.	Realize that asking for help is critical for learning, not a sign of weakness. Appreciate that working with a team is a key skill for success.	Be specific in things that can be done with and without mentor consultation. Define the mentor's role, as well as the role of other team members.
The Backstabber	This mentee rarely fails, but when this does occur, makes excuses or assigns blame to others rather than to personal missteps.	People who work with this mentee once often don't want to do so again. Has difficulty accepting responsibility for any mistake; avoids negative feedback.	Reframe mistakes as a learning opportunity. Make giving credit and accepting responsibility a daily goal.	Emphasize that honesty, not perfection, is critical in a mentee. If mentee cannot accept this responsibility, seek a new mentee.

Submitted Questions 1-5 General

1. What kind of support do mentees need?
2. What are the differences between supervision and mentoring? How can one transition from supervisor/subordinate to mentor/mentee?
3. How to choose a mentor?
4. How do you find co-mentors / outside mentorship?
5. How do you reach out to the mentor to address your professional inexperience/shortcomings?

Submitted Questions 6-11 General

6. How often do you meet with a mentor?
7. How do you make efficient use of meetings?
8. What are good mentor qualities?
9. What are good mentee practices mentors would appreciate?
10. How do you balance the needs of mentees vs mentors?
11. How do you ensure the relationship is beneficial to both parties?

Submitted Questions 12-15 General

12. How much should a mentor help in a mentees job search?
13. When and how do you discuss the next steps in a postdoc's career?
14. How do you help mentees develop and make their projects successful without doing the work yourself? How do you know when to "hand-hold" a student and when to let them figure it out on their own?
15. As a mentor, how do you manage a balance between "harsh and mean" and "strict and high-standards"?

Submitted Questions 16-20 **Conflict**

16. How do you deal with a difficult mentor?
17. How do you deal with a mentor who is over-extended on projects outside of the lab and less involved with lab members?
18. How do you deal with a mentor who doesn't provide advice or guidance?
19. How do you handle conflicts in mentoring (i.e. conflicts between colleagues and senior colleagues)?
20. How do you handle conflicts of interests between mentors and mentees (i.e. when the mentor's interest doesn't align with the mentee's best interest)?

Submitted Questions 21-25 **Conflict**

21. How do you mentor a difficult mentee and set appropriate expectations?
22. How do you motivate those who do not commit enough time and determination to be competitive?
23. How do you balance mentor availability and fostering mentee independence?
24. What are some effective communication skills in mentoring (especially if disagreeing)?
25. How do you deal with disappointments (i.e. mentee leaving after significant time invested)?

Submitted Questions 26-29 **Authorship**

26. How does a mentor ensure they still have ownership over the research being conducted by mentees (especially after they leave)?
27. How do you discuss, determine, and negotiate authorship – while avoiding conflict?
28. How do you decide on first authorship or whether you as the mentor need more first author papers?
29. How do you decide on authorship order for junior members of the lab?

Submitted Question 30 Case study

30. I would like suggestions for how to handle the following situation: Being a non-independent junior faculty member (instructor) at a senior PI's lab, I am mentoring a postdoc on a funded project. The postdoc feels like they do all of the hard work of a young PI. For that reason, the postdoc feels they could be the PI themselves, and therefore they ignore my guidance on project to assert their own independence in the eyes of the senior PI. I have the conflict of fostering the postdoc independence, while at the same time advancing our funded project. The postdoc sees me as an obstacle, and wants to create his/her own research path ...

Summary

1. Effective mentor-mentee relationships are:
 - Highly variable but almost always bi-directional
 - Important for academic success.
2. Do your best to avoid:
 - Mentorship *malpractice*
 - Mentee *missteps*

Good luck creating a research career that you find deeply fulfilling and that provides the optimal work-home balance for you!



From inability to let alone; from too much zeal for the new and contempt for what is old; from putting knowledge before wisdom, and science before art and cleverness before common sense; from treating patients as cases; and from making the cure of the disease more grievous than the endurance of the same, Good Lord, deliver us.

Sir Robert Hutchison
