



## **The Rewards of Mentoring**

### **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**



By Margaret E. Parsons, MD

MEDICINE IS INHERENTLY A WORLD of mentoring. So much of our shared knowledge in medicine is the legacy of oral teaching and working together to care for patients. Our first days of medical school began with senior students telling us the "ins and outs" around school. As we ascended to clinical years, we were guided by our interns and residents. Along our paths through medical school, someone inspired us in a certain specialty of medicine.

We can all remember that moment: "Wow, this is what I want to be and do the rest of my life." Joining a practice, someone helped show us the ropes through new clinics and hospital hallways. In our practice years we may be mentored in other ways, through organized medicine, hospital leadership, university politics, academic pathways, or other areas of volunteering and giving back.

Part of what makes medicine so rewarding for many of us is giving back. One may think of a mentor-mentee relationship as the mentor doing the giving. Yet, the mentor often gains as much as the mentee. We see those we have worked with, talked to and advised, start to ascend their own ladders of successes. We enjoy their successes and accomplishments.

Mentor-mentee relationships may be planned or happenstance. A planned relationship may involve selecting a mentor with a skill set or interest that the mentee hopes to gain. Sometimes early in a career, these may involve lab work or other more process-oriented goals. An example of these relationships at a medical school level may be helping on a project in a lab; or it may be a "matched" relationship to meet with a medical student and faculty or community physician to be a resource about the world of medicine.

As we progress in our careers through residency and practice, many relationships are more of a conversational nature. However, as is often the case in the business community, many of us at this juncture of our careers can benefit as well from formal mentor-mentee relationships. A more formal relationship challenges us in early or mid-career to set goals and truly think about where we are and where we want to go with our careers and life path.

However, the conversational, unplanned mentor-mentee relationship is very valuable. Often these are with someone we work with on a project or someone in a different community, or part of our own larger community that we may know through another institution, health system, or organization. Shared similar experiences are a fertile ground for discussion, thought, and guidance.

Sometimes mentoring relationships are a "pass-through" as someone moves along a path. Perhaps the "match" was not the right one, and the mentor's best gift is to arrange the connection for another mentor, or to suggest a different pathway.

When a project is involved, mentors want the mentee to complete the tasks agreed to and

not take on too big a project. If a mentor extends the opportunity to work on a project, write a chapter, co-author an article, or participate on a committee, it is important that the mentee meet their agreement. Responsibility and trust are a definite part of giving others a step up on the ladder.

Mentoring relationships often evolve into long-lasting friendships. I write this letter as I leave my specialty society meeting where I had the wonderful opportunity to see mentors who are now friends. The former Dr. McBurney, Dr. Amonette, and Dr. Lupo of my residency years are Elizabeth, Rex, and Mary to me now.

And what a joy it has been to see them as we continue to work on projects and shared goals, or tell the stories of where we are now in our lives. Former residents and young physicians who lectured in my symposium session or worked with me on committees have grown in their roles and given truly well-done lectures. They are helping insure the future of medicine will be strong and vibrant through continued committee work and physician representation on topics, including fair physician payment, health care access, and workforce, among many other things I know that my life is so much richer for these experiences and friendships.

At one luncheon meeting of our specialty society, we were asked to introduce ourselves and briefly reflect on our first non-familial mentor. The answers ranged from a tennis coach who encouraged players to always strive to do their best, a high-school math teacher who pulled a student from the crowd and mentored that student (now a physician) through college applications, a physician who helped select a specialty pathway, and early career organizational guidance. Even though we were to speak of "non-familial" mentors, many recognized their parents' faith in their reaching for high goals.

We have all been somewhere along these pathways. I believe physicians are inherently given to mentoring, as so much of medicine is taught by the conversations of rounding on wards or in clinic during our student and residency years.

Rich now as I leave my meeting with many friendships affirmed and renewed, I am grateful for the modern world of e-mail that allows these relationships to always pop in and out throughout the year and across the country and time zones. Truly, mentor-mentee relations are aided by electronic communication. Do not forget however, the value of a phone call or face to face meeting to tie things back together.

With the seemingly ever more busy daily life of the practice of medicine, we do not want to lose this rewarding part of what is inherent to physicians. If you have slowed your practice, the joy of mentoring keeps that gift of sharing of wisdom strong. We will all mentor in different ways: as physicians, as leaders, as teachers, as advisors, as parents, as grandparents, and as friends.

The benefits can extend beyond just the mentor-mentee. Shared projects, goals and visions may result in important research or publication, a successful project for an organization, or other volunteer activity benefiting a community.

For me, mentoring is part of being a physician. I know I will always mentor because of the rewards of seeing a mentee succeed. Yet, I know that I will always be a mentee as well, because I hope to always be learning and facing new challenges. The rewards are great on both sides of this equation.

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