Selecting a Surgical Mentor

Blake Fernandez, MD, Avery Engelbrecht, BS, Christiana M. Shaw, MD, MS, and Sanda A. Tan, MD, PhD
What is a Mentor?

The word mentor, defined today as an individual who is a “developer of talent, a teacher of skills and knowledge of the discipline, an assistant in defining goals, and one who shares social and professional values.”

Historical Perspective

Traditional -

- One-on-one apprenticeship style
- Surgeon taught “the whole education of the pupil”

Historical Perspective

• In 1890, Dr. William Halsted first introduced the idea of surgical residency

• Required trainees to spend 5+ years in a teaching institution with the guidance of a tutor and other teachers
  • Anatomy
  • Clinical skills
  • Surgical skills
  • Research

"Mentoring is a brain to pick, an ear to listen, and a push in the right direction."

- John C. Crosby
Reasons For Selecting a Mentor

- Extensive knowledge and experience
- Help in shaping career - choosing a fellowship/sub-specialty
- Work/life integration
- Network, sponsorship leads to continued career advancement
What mentors can do for residents

- Discuss career/fellowship plans
- Identify areas for improvement
- Help with fellowship applications
- Introduce to others in sub-specialty
- Guidance and sponsorship in research
- Nominate for awards
What mentors can do for fellows/junior faculty

- Discuss long-term career goals
- Identify areas for improvement in CV
- Review promotion and tenure guidelines/start portfolio
- Nominate for committees/organizations
- Facilitate networking
- Guide or sponsor research
- Review contracts
An exceptional mentor is someone who is flexible and willing to serve in different capacities as needed.
Qualities to look for in a mentor

- Dedicated professional
- Knowledgeable
- Innovative and creative
- Compassionate, supportive
- Challenges the mentee
- Acts as a role model
- Trustworthy
- Has track record with other mentees

Top 5 qualities of a mentor

• Serves as a professional role model

• Stays involved in terms of time and effort

• Is compassionate, kind, and supportive

• Acts as a critic, evaluator, and assessor

• Is a leader in the field and challenges the mentee
Challenges of Modern-Day Mentoring

- Constraints of teaching time in and out of the operating room
- Subspecialty and/or diversified training regiments
- Technological and surgical innovations
- Increased focus on quality outcomes
Mentee Responsibility

- Have a defined goal
- Be prepared and punctual, respect the mentor’s time
- Follow through
- Be introspective/self-assess
- Refine your goals
Mentee Responsibility

- Have a desire to learn and improve
- Be open to feedback
- Maintain integrity and honesty in communication
- Be active in professional organizations and seek leadership roles
- Have anti-mentors
- Seek multiple mentors
Where to look for mentor outside of your institution

- American College of Surgeons (Young Fellow Association)
  https://www.facs.org/member-services/yfa/mentor

- American College of Surgeons (Women in Surgery Committee)

- Association of Women Surgeons (Early Career Women Faculty)
  https://www.womensurgeons.org

- Association of Surgical Educators
How to sustain the mentorship

• Be patient with mentor/time challenges
• Do not be afraid to change mentors
• Make time
• Facilitate communication through technology
How to sustain the mentorship

• The two most important factors for a successful mentorship are
  • Success of the trainee
  • Perception of the relationship
Stages of mentorship

Parenting

→ Pace-setting

→ Partnership
Conclusions

Mentorship can help further your career

Mentors can help facilitate fellowships, jobs, organizational leadership, promotion

Seek someone with whom you identify

Consider different mentors for different aspects of career