

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

As a New Year Begins, Think About Mentoring

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August is an exciting time in the academic year. New trainees and new faculty have mostly found the cafeteria and the bathroom, and it is time to settle down into the rhythm of new positions and responsibilities. Regardless of whether one is in a new or ongoing position, it is a good time to think about one's goals for the academic year ahead. And it is a good time to think about what mentorship would be helpful for achieving those goals.

Mentors are critical to the careers of most individuals in our profession, regardless of the specific professional focus. Some believe that mentorship is only important for researchers or for conducting research projects. However, I believe that mentorship is important for all SGIM members, including those who do not conduct research. One of the most important roles of a trusted mentor is to assist with clarifying your values, needs, strengths, and weaknesses so that you can develop the career goals that are best for you. In order to do this, you and the mentor need to have a strong enough relationship to challenge your thinking without you taking offense. It takes some effort invested in the mentor-mentee relationship to get to this stage, but it is well worth it to have a mentor who does more than just agree with you.

Most SGIM members will benefit from more than one mentor. These mentors may form a mentoring team or may meet with you independently. In addition to assisting with overall career issues, different mentors may help with specific areas or projects. For example, clinical mentors may

help you navigate the culture of medicine and your local institution. They may help you deal with conflict that sometimes occurs when managing consultants or leading the primary team caring for the patient in either outpatient or inpatient settings. They can discuss with you difficult cases and alternative diagnostic or therapeutic approaches in the context of the local environment. Educational mentors can assist you by critiquing your early presentations in a given area. They can help you decide what learning method is best suited for particular material and give you advice for learners encountering difficulty. They can help you to negotiate the bureaucracy of getting a new course approved and help you find collaborators or instructors who may be outside your own group. Research mentors can help you to develop a writing style appropriate for medical journals (probably requiring you to unlearn most of the writing principles you learned earlier in life), think through project ideas, conduct research studies, and write (and resubmit) grant applications.

How can SGIM help with your mentoring needs? One of the most accessible mentoring opportunities offered through the national meeting and many regional meetings is the "One-on-One" mentoring program. Under this program, mentees are matched with mentors whom they have requested or with whom the program coordinators feel there is a good match. The "One-on-One" mentor and mentee find a mutually agreeable time to meet during the given meeting, usually for 60 to 90 minutes. Usually the mentee sets the agenda

for the session, and the agendas can be quite diverse. For example, I have participated in sessions that included overall career direction advice, feedback on a specific research project, achieving personal-professional balance, and getting involved in SGIM. Sometimes these sessions develop into an ongoing relationship, and after a while, I may not know anymore which of us is the mentor.

I have a special fondness for the one-on-one mentoring programs because Seth Landefeld and I initiated this program for an annual meeting we ran some years ago. However, SGIM offers several other mentoring venues. As examples, and not meant to be exhaustive, I would point to several programs. Small group mentoring has been held at several national and regional meetings (similar to One-on-One mentoring but with a small group of mentees). Mentoring panel discussions (specific for clinician-educators and clinician-investigators), were held at the recent national meeting. A phone mentoring program was set up by the Disparities Task Force. The Research Committee has set up a database compendium (with personal advice on the databases available for SGIM members) and has assembled examples of successful career development grant applications. Many internal groups have listservs that provide answers to questions posed by participants. With the enhanced internal communications capabilities of our new website (GIM Connect, nearing completion), I am hoping that additional groups will form that will provide mentoring on an even wider array of topics.

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There exists a substantial literature on mentorship, but I would highlight an excellent article written by several SGIM members¹ that discusses the responsibility of the mentee to actively manage the mentoring relationship. These authors discuss how the mentee can set the agenda for meetings with the mentor, complete assigned tasks between meetings, and generally take ownership of the relationship. These ideas are quite applicable to mentoring as discussed in this article and

can help keep a mentoring relationship strong. It is important for a mentor-mentee relationship to be satisfying and successful for both partners.

Quality mentorship greatly enhances the chance of a vital and satisfying career, regardless of career emphasis. While mentorship may take many forms, it is valuable to have some ongoing mentoring relationships. It is also helpful to have mentors both at the local institution and at other institutions; SGIM

greatly facilitates these regional and national mentoring relationships. I hope that all members will think about mentorship when planning participation at regional and national SGIM meetings.

Reference

1. Zerzan JT, Hess R, Schur E, Phillips RS, Rigotti N. Making the most of mentors: a guide for mentees. *Acad Med* 2009; 84:140-4.

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