



Developing a GI Fellowship Mentoring Program

Background

During gastroenterology fellowship, gastroenterology fellows develop their skills to become clinicians, academicians, teachers and researchers. One of the many aspects of training that occur during fellowship is mentoring. There are a variety of possible mentors for GI fellows, such as research (basic or clinical) advisors, clinicians/faculty with mutual interest in a specific area of gastroenterology, or faculty with a particular expertise – which may be outside of the field of GI. A mentee may have more than one mentor at the same time, or change mentors during their fellowship. There are formal and informal mentors, however, it is important to have a formalized program so that all fellows have at least one mentor to facilitate professional development and career selection. A successful mentoring program has both structure and expectations from both the mentor and mentee. These aspects will be described in this document.

In an American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) survey conducted in March and April 2009, gastroenterology fellows were asked questions about mentoring. An overwhelming 96 percent of fellows thought it was important to have a mentor during fellowship. Although 79 percent of trainees surveyed had a mentor, almost half (49 percent) of the gastroenterology training programs did not have a formal mentoring program.

Given the importance of mentors and mentoring to fellows, it is believed that both general and specific information about the mentoring process would be useful to mentors and mentees alike as well as program training directors and division chiefs. This document therefore focuses primarily on elements important in developing a mentoring program within a gastroenterology training program¹

¹ An abbreviated version of these guidelines were published in AGA Perspectives, Dec. 2010/Jan. 2011.

² It should also be noted that the AGA is working to create opportunities for gastroenterology trainees to develop relationships with mentors from across the country through the AGA Mentor and Advisor Program (AGA MAP).

Guidelines for developing a mentoring program within a GI division

1. Determine who can be a mentor based on the needs of the fellows and program.
Examples: Research advisors, Attending with the GI Division, Any Faculty
2. Solicit mentors based on availability and commitment to the mentoring program.
3. Train mentors on how to be a good mentor. (There are many resources for this type of training, see references.)
4. Establish expectations for frequency of formal meetings. This will vary depending on the intensity of the need, for example, a research fellow may need more frequent meetings depending on how much time the mentee is spending on research whereas for a busy clinical fellow, the frequency of meetings could be once a quarter.
 - The frequency and length of meetings should be agreed upon by the mentor and mentee.
5. Once a year, establish a review of the mentoring relationship by the fellowship director or a fellowship research committee.
6. Establish a Mentoring Agreement as a tool to facilitate the development of the mentoring relationship. This document is confidential between the mentor, mentee and fellowship director. In addition, when submitting the agreement to the fellowship director, mentees should only submit those goals/objectives that they are comfortable sharing. (An example of a mentoring agreement can be found in Appendix A).
7. The mentor and mentee must mutually agree to some level of confidentiality within their relationship. Their definition will determine how information is shared both within and outside the partnership. This should be outlined in the mentoring agreement.

Ground rules for mentor-mentee relationships and meetings

It should generally be the responsibility of the mentee to reach out to the mentor for meetings, and it is the responsibility of the mentor to make the time for the mentee. It is often helpful for the mentee to have a list of potential areas of interest, and if the mentor is for a project (i.e., basic or clinical research), then a list of projects from which they can choose mentors will give additional guidance. It is also useful to make the track record of mentors in your division available to the mentee.

Several elements may help ensure a successful mentoring relationship, which can be included in a mentoring agreement (see below); these include several of the following:

- Prior to the first meeting with a mentor, fellows should write down at least three things that they would like to achieve through mentoring. Rank the three items in order of importance.
- Fellows should write down at least three things that they would like their mentor to provide as part of the relationship.
- Prepare a brief CV to share with your mentor when you first meet. Be sure to also include your own vision, mission or life goals.

Why be a mentor? / Why be a mentee?

This interaction should be a mutually fulfilling experience.

- **For the Mentee:** Interact, gain knowledge, learn strategies from more experienced individuals. Begin to build a network.
- **For the Mentor:** Opportunity to develop a fellow by sharing your experiences, expand your network.

What makes a good mentor?

- A willingness and motivation to help others
- A commitment to the program
- Good interpersonal skills
- Solid knowledge in the area of interest
- A high degree of job satisfaction
- Demonstration of behaviors that model the program's values
- A commitment to invest the time necessary to assist in an individual's personal development
- Good listening skills

Tips for mentors, mentees, and both

At the core of virtually all successful and personally satisfying mentoring is a meaningful relationship with another person.

Here are some general tips for developing a positive mentoring relationship:

- **Logistics and timing of meetings.**

Set aside the appropriate length of time for a productive meeting, usually one hour. In addition, choose the appropriate time for a meeting, for example do not choose a time late in the evening when either person has been on call the night before.

- **Make a list.**

Prepare for the first meeting: make a list of things that you believe are important in the mentoring relationship with the person you will be meeting with. The list might include information about you that you want to share. **For the mentor**, it may include what it was like to be starting out, what it was like to make the decision for your career path, or about expectations concerning the mentoring relationship. **For the mentee**, it may include factors leading to your decision to become a gastroenterologist, goals during fellowship, or any areas of concern. Write these details down in note form and discuss with the person you will be meeting with.

- **Be clear about purpose and boundaries.**

Gift-giving, loaning money, or becoming involved in dispute resolution are all out-of-bounds. Feel comfortable discussing ethical or moral issues. Advocate for career advancement as appropriate.

- **Create an agenda.**

When you meet, ask the other person if it is okay if you identify some items for an agenda. List two or three and then ask the other person if they have any items they would like to add. Some of the typical items are: (1) getting to know each other, (2) logistics, (3) goals and expectations, (4) concerns that might interfere with meeting together, (5) initial impressions, (6) questions they have about you, and (7) why they think you would be a good mentor/mentee.

- **Listen deeply and ask powerful questions.**

The two skills that are essential for a successful mentoring relationship are (1) in-depth listening, that is, suspending judgment, listening for understanding and providing an accepting and supportive atmosphere; and (2) asking powerful questions, that is, questions that are challenging in a friendly way and questions that help the other person talk about what is important to them.

- **Plan for the next meeting.**

When you come to the end of a meeting, review the mutually developed goals to determine progress. Then solicit any ideas about what might be discussed at the next

meeting. Also ask for an impression of how the meeting went and what you might be able to do (or stop doing) next time to make the next meeting as good or better.

- **Maintain and respect privacy, honesty, and integrity.**

We have all had experience participating in events where these key values have been jeopardized and know first hand the disastrous consequences that can accompany violating these values. You can't offer confidentiality in the legal sense, but can do the best to ensure that "what is said in the room stays in the room."

- **Be responsive.**

It is critically important that both mentor and mentee establish expectations about when things will be finished – and most importantly that they complete these on time. Respond to calls and emails in a timely fashion. Create timelines and adhere to them.

- **Encourage open communication in the relationship.**

Let the other person know why you are asking a particular question after having explored other options. The focus of most successful mentoring is mutual learning. Feel free to explore what you have to offer each other. A sense of humor and a sense of enjoyment of your time together are essential.

Tips for Mentors

- **Be approachable and accessible.**

Make it a point to be open to potential mentees otherwise they will not seek you out! Make it easy for mentees to talk and to meet with you.

- **Be on time...**

And stick to the agreed upon meeting time - don't shift it around to accommodate your busy schedule, except in an absolute emergency.

- **Experiment with process.**

Over a period of several meetings, you might use coaching, role playing, simulations, role rehearsals, experiential learning activities, brainstorming, and other techniques that feel natural to you.

- **Focus on wisdom.**

See yourself as a resource, catalyst, facilitator, idea generator, networker, and problem-solver, but do not see yourself as a person with answers. Do share experience and how you think you have learned from those experiences, but do not see the mentor role as one in which you "tell" the other person what to do or how to do it. Freely share what you have done (or have learned), not as a prescription, but more as an example of something from which you gained some wisdom. Feel comfortable contributing ideas or suggestions, not as a sage, but as a collaborator.

- **Suggest other Mentors.**

If you get into areas that you are not able to provide expert mentoring advice, recognize these and suggest other people who may help; in some circumstances, even reach out to these others on behalf of your mentee.

Tips for Mentees

- **Choose wisely.**

The best predictor of future success is usually past success. Pick a mentor with a proven track record of mentoring house officers and/or fellows. Talk to other mentees and ask for their experiences with specific mentors. Talk to other faculty members. Feel free to ask your potential mentor about his/her track record, his/her philosophy about research, clinical practice, or your area(s) of interest.

- **Take the initiative for the first meeting.**

Take the initiative to make the first call, but as part of the Mentoring Agreement, determine who will organize meetings moving forward.

- **Bring ideas and "a plan of attack" to all of your meetings.**

Bring ideas to your meetings, in particular to your initial planning meetings. Be prepared to tell your mentor what you think, why it is important, and what your ideas about developing your ideas are. Be prepared, and expect, to give an update on what you have accomplished at each meeting.

- **Demonstrate initiative, leadership, and self-reliance.**

- **Actively seek feedback.**

Look at what you have accomplished. Ask how you are doing, acknowledge that you would like to improve and ask how you can accomplish this.

- **Reassess your goals frequently.**

Ask yourself if you have accomplished what you set out to at the beginning of the process. If you *are* meeting your goals, communicate this to your mentor. If you *are not* meeting your goals, also communicate this, and think about how you might meet your goals. Your mentor should be willing to strategize with you.

- **Communicate your wishes openly and honestly.**

If your needs are not being met, discuss this with your mentor. Terminating a mentoring relationship or switching to a different mentor is not a sign of failure by either party. Recognizing your changing needs and finding a respectful way to meet your learning goals are critical.

Resources

AAMC. Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors. 2006

<http://www.aamc.org/research/postdoccompact/>

Baez, A. (2010). Mentoring and professional development in clinical research. *Personal Communication*.

Bussey-Jones, J., Bernstein, L., Higgins, S, Malebranche, D., Paranjape, A., Genao, I., Lee, B., and Branch, B. (2006). *Repaving the Road to Academic Success: The IMeRGE Approach to Peer Mentoring Academic Medicine*, 81(7).

Drossman, D.A. (2007). Practice Management: On Mentoring. *American Journal of Gastroenterology*, 102, 1848–1852.

Feldman, M., Phil, M., Huang, L., Guglielmo, B.J., Jordan, R., Kahn, J., Creasman, J.M., Wiener-Kronish, J.P., Lee, K.A., Tehrani, A., Yaffe, K., and Brown, J.A. (2009). Training the Next Generation of Research Mentors: The University of California, San Francisco, Clinical & Translational Science Institute Mentor Development Program. *Clinical and Translational Science*, 2(3): 216–221.

Lee, A., Davis, C., and Campbell, P. (2007). Nature's Guide for Mentors. *Nature*, 447, 791-797.

National Leadership Workshop on Mentoring Women in Biomedical Careers
MEETING PROCEEDINGS Office of Research on Women's Health, National Institutes of Health (<http://womeninscience.nih.gov/mentoring/>)

Phillip-Jones L. (2003). *The Mentors Guide*. How to be the kind of mentor you once had – or wish you'd had. Coalition of Counseling Centers/the Mentoring Group Grass Valley, CA.

Phillip-Jones, L. (2003). *The Mentees Guide*. How to have a successful relationship with a mentor. Coalition of Counseling Centers/the Mentoring Group Grass Valley, CA.

Mentoring Agreement (Example)

This agreement outlines how the mentoring relationship will proceed and the commitment of both parties to the relationship.

1. How often will we meet formally (monthly, quarterly, etc.) and where:

2. Who will schedule the formal meetings: _____

3. In addition to the formal meetings, will there be informal communication, and if yes, by what means (e-mail, phone, face-to-face etc)? _____

4. Goals for the mentoring relationship:

a. Mentee

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

b. Mentor

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

5. Confidentiality agreement. (How will information be shared both within and outside the partnership? Define expectations.)

I agree to put my best effort forth to create a successful mentoring relationship and to achieve the goals and standards set forth above.

Mentor's signature

Mentee's signature

Date

Date